

STAR TREK
THE NEXT GENERATION

ROLEPLAYING GAME

H OLODECK ADVENTURES



HOLODECK ADVENTURES



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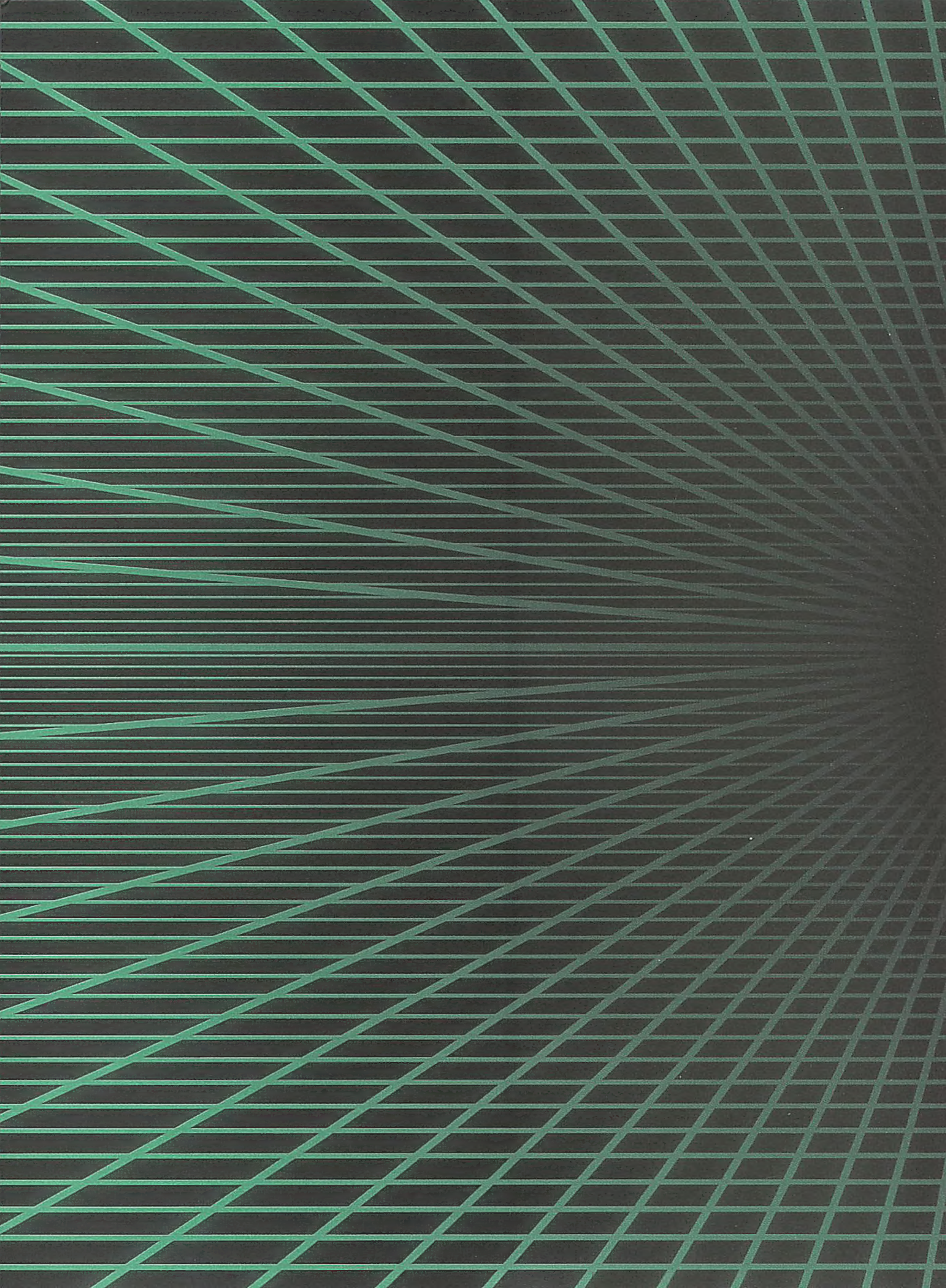


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PROLOGUE

Dixon Hill leaned back in his chair with his feet on his desk. Mrs. Harrison glared at him across the piles of papers and the electric fan. Lieutenant Plunkett maintained a firm grip on the woman's shoulder.

"So you see, Lieutenant, the money never left Mrs. Harrison's car. She slipped the envelope beneath the driver's seat and thought we wouldn't find it. She hid it well, but she missed one minor point—Mrs. Harrison assumed no one else would drive her car, and the envelope created a slightly uncomfortable lump in the seat."

"How did you know?" Mrs. Harrison cried, her face flush with embarrassment.

"You were adamant I not drive your Packard," said Dix. "That made me suspicious right away. You never let me out of your sight, so you'd know if I tried searching the car myself. So the last time you came to see me here in the office, I asked Madeline to go pick up the latest newspapers. While she was downstairs, she slipped into the Packard's driver's seat and felt the lump."

Dix rose from his chair and approached Mrs. Harrison. "You're not as innocent as you seem, honey. You knew all about Little Wally delivering the payoff and what time Nicky the Nose was supposed to show up for it. You just didn't expect Nicky's goons to stop you and glance over your car. Hiding the cash under the seat worked like a charm."

"Problem is, you bumped Little Wally off over that dough," Lieutenant Plunkett added.

"He had it coming," Mrs. Harrison sneered.

"Sure," Dix said. "But one murder doesn't cancel out another, does it, hon?"

Mrs. Harrison shrugged out of Plunkett's grip, stepped toward Dixon Hill and swung her hand at his face.

"Engineering to Lieutenant Cartwright."

"Computer, pause program." Mrs. Harrison's hand froze before it could slap Dixon Hill's face. "Cartwright here."

When work troubled him, Cartwright disappeared into the holographic world of Dixon Hill. Investigating seedy crimes in 1940s San Francisco wasn't exactly fixing power transfer systems, but it engaged the same parts of his mind and made him think in ways they didn't teach back at Starfleet Academy. Examining the problem from various perspectives helped uncover the solution.

"We need you back down here to help us reroute power through that blown transfer conduit feeding the portside warp nacelle plasma injector."

"No problem," he said. "Give me five minutes to change. Cartwright out."

"Looks like we'll have to continue this another day, Mrs. Harrison." He called for the arch, then stepped out of the smoky 1940s office into a 24th century starship corridor. Several crewmembers stared at his Dixon Hill outfit, some bemused, others puzzled. Cartwright didn't mind. He felt ready to tackle the challenges awaiting him in engineering. Who would have thought solving murders as Dixon Hill would help warm up anyone for figuring out warp propulsion problems?

INTRODUCTION

Serving aboard a Federation starship isn't always as exciting as the recruitment advertisements claim. Between confrontations with Cardassians and incidents along the Neutral Zone lurk countless hours of shipboard routine.

To break the monotony, head down for the holodeck where you'll find the perfect environment for entertainment and personal improvement. Here the wonders of technology create artificial environments and characters capable of interacting with real people. Forcefield generators, hologram projectors, tractor beams and sensors all work together to produce realistic training and recreation experiences.

But the holodeck isn't just sterile technology. A holodeck program strives to provide an authentic interactive experience. Need to stay in shape and want a stimulating exercise environment? Run the Grand Canyon simulation and hike down to the Colorado River. Hone your combat skills in a Klingon melee program (safety overrides even ensure nobody gets hurt). Learn about various historical periods in a variety of cultures by living them on the holodeck. Interact with famous people from the past and present. Starfleet even administers some exams as holographic simulations.

But crewmembers don't just use the holodeck for training. Programmers create routines simulating a variety of situations, many with complex plot, characters and settings ideal for entertainment. These programs help crewmembers momentarily escape from the problems confronting their lives, giving them some time away and perhaps a chance to gain a new perspective. Holographic programs allow them to pursue their interests and hobbies, explore fascinating new environments and enjoy classic literature genres firsthand.

To use the holodeck to its fullest potential, crewmembers must learn certain holodeck protocols for interacting with holographic characters and settings. Once they've become comfortable in various historical periods or genres, they can alter holodeck programs to suite their own entertainment or education requirements. With enough experience, participants can create their own environments, stories and characters from the ground up.

WELCOME TO THE HOLODECK

Holodeck Adventures provides everything you need to run your own holodeck escapades in your *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* series. You'll discover the holodeck's inner workings, programming secrets for realistic simulations and ideas for creating your own holodeck stories. Several adventures give you a taste for various genres popular for holodeck programmers and participants—perfect interludes to break up the tension of shipboard life.

Chapter One: The Holodeck describes how the holodeck creates a fully interactive environment for crewmembers. Learn about technical details involving holographic emitters and gravity generators. Explore a variety of commercially available and customized holodeck programs and the interface theories behind their operation.

Chapter Two: Holodeck Programming provides Narrators with hints on integrating holodeck episodes into ongoing series as interludes or plot enhancements. You can create your own customized programs and personae using these tips for generating solid stories and interesting characters.

Chapter Three: Dixon Hill and the Case of the Golden Serpent brings the excitement of this popular genre to your own holodeck. In 1940s San Francisco, private investigator Dixon Hill delves into a case involving a wronged wife, a deceptive maid, one dead archaeologist and his missing treasure. Dix and his friends must solve the mystery and avoid becoming the victims of mobsters who want to possess the Golden Serpent.

Chapter Four: The Doom that Came to Korath plunges characters into a classic Centauran holonovel of horror, betrayal and unspeakable evil. A young prince returns to his homeland to claim his rightful throne—and the deadly curse consuming everyone around him. King Korvos must discover the curse's secret, navigate his court's maze of diplomacy and twisted alliances and defeat the hideous monstrosity that plagued his bloodthirsty ancestors for generations.

Chapter Five: The Falcon's Gold brings swashbuckling high adventure to the holodeck. Assume the role of Captain Beauregard and his crew aboard the pirate galleon *Atocha*. Search the Caribbean for buried treasure while eluding the nefarious Spanish governor and the dread pirate Ironface and his crew of cutthroats.

The Sword and the Skull is a full adventure available from the Last Unicorn Games website. It pits Prince Eldred and his companions against the might of the Skull King and his troll armies. Can Eldred find the Sword of Vanderlac in time? Includes rules for holographic "magic" and describes the lands of Boralia. Visit us at www.lastunicorngames.com.

THE HOLODECK

Perhaps the most impressive technological advancement of the 24th century is the holodeck. Keeping passengers and crews entertained during long voyages has remained a concern since the earliest days of spaceflight. During the early moon missions, astronauts received transmissions of their favorite music. On later missions to Mars, spacecraft incorporated a small recreation area, for games and exercise. Engineers outfitted the *Constitution* class of starships with lounges, gymnasiums and botanical gardens, for the crew's enjoyment. Yet the desire to experience images, sounds and tactile sensations—to enjoy a truly interactive form of entertainment—continued. After a series of breakthroughs in small forcefield and imaging devices, the holodeck provided just such an experience. Today, holodecks furnish much-needed rest and recreation on starships, enhancing the crew's operational activities.

THE HOLODECK

The holodeck operates by utilizing two main subsystems—the matter conversion subsystem and the holographic imagery subsystem. The matter conversion subsystem creates the physical props, and is related to the standard replicator. The background environment is created by the holographic imagery subsystem. Under normal operating parameters, an occupant in a holodeck simulation is unable to distinguish between a real object and a simulated one.

The matter conversion subsystem utilizes transporters and high-precision replicators as an integral part of the holodeck's operation. The computer replicates those physical props required by a particular program, such as furniture, food and weapons. These objects have a physical reality, unlike those created by forcebeam imagery (see below), and can be removed from the holodeck. While inside the holodeck, objects remain under computer control for safety reasons. Replicators and transporters can also be used to create a variety of environmental effects, such as rain or snow. Additional stimuli, such as sound, taste and smell, are simulated using more mundane means (atomizers or speakers, for instance), or are part of the replicated object.

The basic mechanism of the imagery subsystem is the omni-directional holo diode, or OHD. The OHD comprises two microminiature subsystems—an optical projector and forcefield projector. Individual OHDs measure 0.01 mm across, and have the capacity to project small, precisely calibrated frequencies of light and sound as well as highly directional forcefields. Entire walls and floors are covered with OHD clusters, produced in a wide-roll circuit printing process, and receive power through standard electro plasma taps. Working together, the entire network of OHDs can instantly project any desired visual image or force field construct anywhere in the holodeck. The optical data network sends impulses similar to that for smaller display screens, though complete walls and floors

are broken down into manageable high-speed segments. Dedicated high-speed subprocessors of the starship's main computers drive these room-sized displays.

The optical processor projects full-color stereoscopic images. Each OHD projects a small segment of the overall image. As the viewer moves, the visible image changes, based on its position on the surface panel. Beyond two or three meters from the visitor, the environment is composed solely of visual holograms. The background imagery allows the visitor to experience distances apparently larger than the holodeck can accommodate. The environment can be scrolled to continue as the visitor moves about the room, contributing to the sensation of movement. When creating holographic elements, such as trees or rocks, the computer directs individual OHDs to intersect at a particular point on a forcefield wireframe.

The OHD also generates tiny, steerable forcefields to give substance to foreground objects. The vast number of OHDs, synchronized under computer control, can produce a substantial cumulative effect. Utilizing a polygon coordinate system to direct certain OHDs to intersect their fields, the holodeck creates the three-dimensional form. For example, if the holodeck recreates a large rock, the computer would first build the three-dimensional surface of the rock. The computer then projects the proper image "over" this forcefield wireframe, creating extremely realistic holographic constructs that can be viewed and handled from multiple angles. The OHDs provide tactile simulation depending on the forcefield's intensity, providing the proper feedback one might expect from a tree or chair. The only limiting factors to the number and kinds of objects described by the computers are memory storage and processing power. Objects created as pure holographic images cannot be removed from the holodeck; thus a rock created by the holodeck cannot be removed from the room.

Using a similar method, the holodeck can create remarkably lifelike recreations of humanoids and other lifeforms. As with holographic props, the computer constructs a forcefield wireframe and overlays the character's appearance. Animation is provided through manipulation of the position of the forcefields. The strength of the forcefield can be varied, to produce a variety of effects; for example, a holographic character can be made to punch with tremendous force, or none at all. These are, essentially, realistic "puppets." They exhibit behavior almost exactly like living beings, depending on software limitations.

Each OHD also contains a miniature keiyurium-based sensor array. These sensors allow the holodeck's central processor to precisely pinpoint each individual in the holographic environment. In this way, the computer can keep track of a visitor's whereabouts, and modify the program accordingly. Holographic characters can be made to interact fully with the occupant in a lifelike manner, and the computer knows when a visitor leaves one room and enters another.

CAPABILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

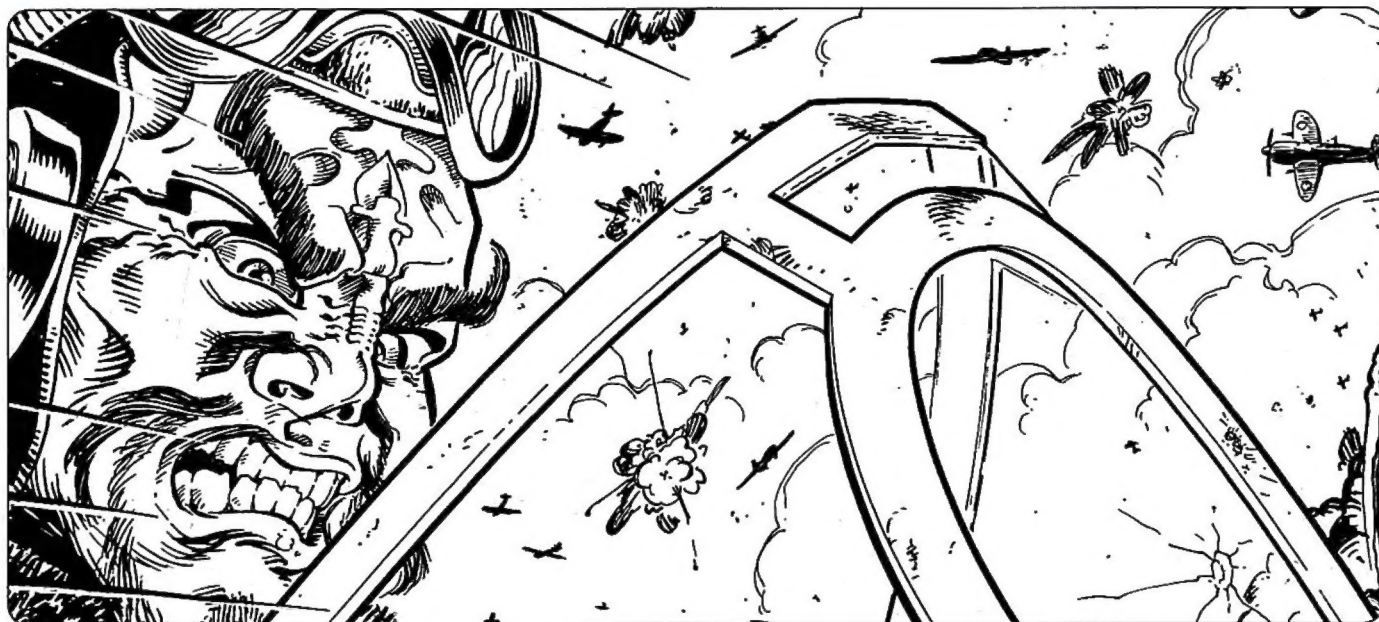
The holodeck can simulate a stunning variety of environments, from the vacuum of space to the depths of the Atlantic Ocean, and situations, such as flight or orbital reentry. Altering standard ship systems that are not a part of the holodeck proper—such as deactivating the gravity generators to create a weightless environment—can produce some effects. Other effects require the wholesale creation of the desired environment; for instance simulating a raging river entails replicating a large volume of water rushing over holographically created rocks. Some environments call for a clever manipulation of the occupant's senses; a substrate forcefield "treadmill" produces the effect of walking beyond the room's apparent boundaries, while to simulate the perception of height simply calls for floor and ceiling backdrops at the proper perspective.

The holodeck can create multiple separate environments for several occupants. In this way, four people could split up into two groups and pursue two different simulations simultaneously. Using advanced sound damping technology and careful use of forcefield "treadmills," multiple participants could wander around their environment completely unaware that their unseen companions might only be a few meters away.

Individual programs can modify an occupant's appearance or abilities to suit the needs of the simulation. By using forcefields and the proper textures, for example, the holodeck can create an illusory pair of wings. (The computer would then monitor the occupant's movements, translating the proper visual and physical cues—running and jumping into the air, for example—into a simulation of flight.) Similarly, a Human occupant could be made to have the strength of a Vulcan. However, the holodeck cannot provide knowledge or skills the operator does not already possess, though it can simulate these as a part of the program. The holodeck can compensate for a visitor unfamiliar with the operation of a primitive internal combustion vehicle (colloquially known as a "car") by substituting more familiar controls, or simply retaining control of the vehicle. The range of effects is virtually unlimited.

The holodeck has a few important limitations. The replicators used to produce props suffer from the same limits as any other replicator. Gourmands can readily tell replicated food from fresh, and connoisseurs can distinguish a reproduction from an original. Replicators cannot reproduce living organisms, and most weapons remain under computer control (phasers are set at setting three, for example).

Space is another limitation. A standard holodeck measures eight meters on a side and four meters in height, and can accommodate up to a dozen occupants at a time. Occupants must either stick together or split up into no more than two or three individual groups; managing more than this becomes impractical, as there is simply not enough room for the members of each group to have a full range of action.



Holodecks typically have occupancy restrictions, and most programs also recommend a maximum number of participants.

The final limitation involves programming. Holographic characters believe in the reality in which they exist, unless programmed otherwise. Programmed to respond to their environment and participants along specific parameters, deviations can easily confuse them. In the popular Dixon Hill simulation, for example, the characters treat the user designated as "Dixon Hill" as Dixon Hill. They relate to participants and each other as though they lived in 20th century San Francisco. Discussions of EPS systems, starships and Klingons only bewilder them. Similarly, holographic characters follow their programming as best they can. Even if presented with circumstances unforeseen by the programmer, they continue to play through the story.

Finally, with the exception of purely physical powers like telekinesis, holographic characters and objects generally cannot be affected by psionic powers. Psionics cannot read or control the minds of holographic characters, use psychometry on holographic objects or fool holographic guards with psionic illusions. Many members of naturally telepathic species like Vulcans and Betazoids often find holo-adventures to be somewhat flat and artificial, but some psionics find interacting with characters whose minds cannot be read both intriguing and challenging.

SAFEGUARDS

Some holodeck programs include the element of danger, from orbital skydiving simulations to stories involving gun-toting gangsters. Because the holodeck can simulate almost any object or situation, safety protocols are in place to prevent injury to users. Typically, the holodeck only simulates objects and situations that could cause injury. A replicated tommy

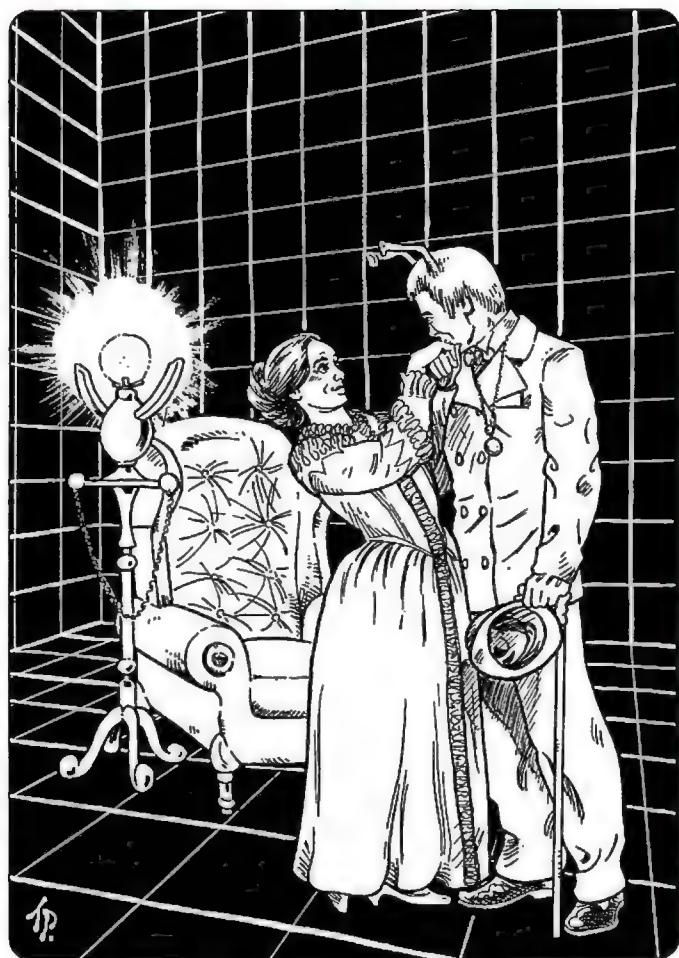
gun, for example, does not fire live ammunition; instead, particular OHDs project light forcefield pulses to imitate bullet impacts. Holographic characters pull their punches, their attacks resulting in little more than a light tap. Sometimes accidents happen, however, and the holodeck cannot prevent injuries caused by situations beyond its control.

Some users prefer to vicariously experience real physical hazards. Within certain predefined parameters the user can set a holodeck's hazard level. This scale ranges from level one—the safest—to level five. At level one, the holodeck cannot cause injury; a holographic character's fist produces no kinetic force, tractor beams prevent replicated swords from connecting, phaser fire is simulated. These commands are frequently used in programs designed for small children. Even at hazard level five, the holodeck works to prevent critical injuries, though the occupant can expect minor damage—from simulated punches, for example—to feel exceedingly real. At the normal level of operation a visitor should suffer nothing more than occasional bruises and sprains, depending on the type of program being used.

An authorized command officer, such as the captain, first officer, or chief engineer can disengage these safeguards, through the use of their override codes. In doing so, the user risks serious injury, however, and this is not recommended. Whenever safeguards are switched off the computer warns the user of the potentially lethal nature of the scenario. Otherwise, multiply redundant safeguards prevent unauthorized tampering with holodeck systems.

PROGRAMMING

Holodeck programs are created both commercially—Dixon Hill, The Adventures of a British Secret Agent, The Story of Kahless and Lukara—and privately—rock climbing on Altair VI, the Kriosian Temple of



Akadar, the Utopia Planitia Fleet Yards. The program defines not only the environment to be recreated, but also defines the behavior of any holographic characters and determines the boundaries of the story. To a certain extent, holodeck programs are just that—a series of commands to be carried out by the computer. The tremendous processing power available to the holodeck allows for an amazing level of sophistication, however; holographic characters actually respond to a visitor's actions and speech.

Holodeck programs generally fall into one of two categories—the static environment and the interactive. The former creates a specific environment with little or no animation, such as the Kriosian Temple of Akadar or a Risean mudbath. While simple to program, these static holo-programs are quite limited. An interactive program either provides a more animated setting or a story in which the occupant can participate. For the latter, the programmer must go into much more detail.

In its most basic form, holodeck programming is quite easy. Commands can be input via either control panel or voice command. The programmer simply instructs the computer to create a specific setting from its memory banks or assemble individual elements to create a wholly new environment. In this way, it is possible to create anything from a 20th century cock-

tail lounge or Vulcan's Tai-La plateau to the Madhatter's tea party. In addition, the programmer defines the parameters for any holographic characters, from specific appearance to behavior patterns—choosing to make the Madhatter tall or short, plump or thin, menacing or merely entertaining. Simple characters can be made to respond to particular stimuli, while complex characters can be given detailed personality profiles. Finally, the programmer fine-tunes the simulation, altering the terrain, color scheme, temperature, lighting effects, and so on.

While many people create and play their own holographic stories, the potential for surprise can be limited. Instead, many people use commercially created holo-programs, like the popular Dixon Hill stories, or produce stories for their friends' enjoyment. It is also possible to simply instruct the computer to create a story using general parameters, such as an espionage thriller or a recreation of the Battle of Tong Vey. While the story may fit the desired genre quite well, many people find these plots to be overly linear.

Finally, the computer is limited by the information on the subject contained in its memory banks. For example, in order to replay the Battle of Tong Vey, the computer must have accurate information on the unfolding of the battle, as well as precise physical details on the terrain, armaments and costuming.

One additional note on holoprograms: It is entirely possible to simulate a real person using visual images, voice recordings and personality profiles, but doing so without the consent of the individual is a serious invasion of privacy. The Federation proscribes the unauthorized use of such materials to create a holographic simulation. Under some extreme circumstances, however, this prohibition has been circumvented, usually in order to save lives.

HOLODECK

PROGRAMMING

This chapter provides the Narrator with tips and advice on introducing holodeck elements into an ongoing series. It shows you how to use holodeck activity as the focus of an episode, as a sub-plot or as a thematic device. It details the way in which, with the introduction of holodeck malfunctions, a routine jaunt on the holodeck can turn suddenly dangerous. It also goes on to describe some of the most popular genres among Starfleet personnel, from the cliffhanger to the western.

The next section takes you step by step through the process of designing your own holodeck adventures—from the basic flow-chart structure used by holonovel creators when sketching out their stories to creating holographic personas to populate your stories. It describes the challenges of fool-proof plot construction in a situation where the player characters (PCs) control the game environment.

The final section prepares you to handle the common situation in which Crew members program their own holodeck experiences.

STORYTELLING ADVICE

Writers of *Star Trek* episodes take full advantage of the holodeck's potential as a dramatic device. They use it to illustrate characterization, create "story within a story" structures, vary the pace between episodes, put familiar characters in new settings, inject humor into the series by spoofing popular genres and, with the aid of holodeck malfunctions, to create new threats and ethical conundrums for the *Enterprise* crew. When their characters visit the holodeck, your players will expect the same from you.

ROLE IN YOUR STORY

When creating an episode involving the holodeck, first determine how important this element will be to your story. It may be the main focus of your episode, or feature as a sub-plot. The holodeck may have relevance to your entire campaign; you might plan for this when you introduce it, or find that it spontaneously grows in importance as your series progresses and takes on a life and character of its own.

MAIN FOCUS

One of the standard rules of adventure storytelling is to always make the stakes as high as possible; you want the audience to care whether or not the heroes solve the problem before them. This rule explains why you almost never see an entire episode of *Star Trek* given over to the completion of a straightforward holonovel adventure. On a holodeck, the stakes are too low to foster interesting drama. Who cares if bad things happen? Any negative result can be erased with a single voice command to the computer. Mistakes can be unmade, deaths reversed.

PADD BRIEFINGS

Holoprogrammers often create databases intended to be read on PADD devices before the participants begin the novel as a whole (in the case of free-form programs) or before each chapter (in some more rigidly directed programs). These not only provide replicator specifications for the costumes required for each scene, but brief the participants on such matters as genre conventions, period slang and character backstory. They may suggest simple demeanors for the participants to adopt if they like that sort of thing.

It is not uncommon for only one participant to actually read the PADD briefings. Often that participant, who generally takes the central role, turns out to be the enthusiast who really wants to partake in the holonovel; he drags his friends into the novel with him and then fills them in on the briefing material as the action progresses. If he's a true connoisseur of the genre, he'll go further, adding facts and observations the holoprogrammer left out. These dedicated participants are the most likely to adopt the suggested demeanors, follow the rules and refuse to alter the parameters of the program. Their frustrated friends may not be so interested in the "pure" experience.

One way around this is to make the adventure matter to the Crew in a way that doesn't threaten the heroes directly, but makes them care about story. The Narrator could choose a theme that resonates with one or more of the characters—if the Crew recently failed a mission, for example, a holodeck story that parallels the situation may engross them more. The story might jeopardize something important to the character, at least metaphorically; if a PC has a dependant, for example, playing a holonovel involving the rescue of a young child is more immediate (even though the child is holographic). Threatening the player character's pride can also make the character care; an expert on Dixon Hill doesn't want to be bested by Nicki the Nose, especially in front of his friends.

On the other hand, not every story needs to involve high stakes. Sometimes, the Crew (and players) simply want to throw caution to the wind, to dodge poisoned darts, leap wide chasms and mix it up with low-rent goons. At these times, the holodeck is the best alternative, and a raucous holonovel is just the ticket. It is precisely because a holodeck adventure has no consequences that Crewmembers can let their hair down and go nuts.

There is a time-honored way, however, to up the stakes on the holodeck: through the intervention of various catastrophes and anomalies.

MALFUNCTIONS

People in the 24th century trust holodeck technology. Like the transporter, it almost never fails; otherwise people wouldn't routinely use it.

As Narrator, however, you have no obligation to keep the things that happen to your Crew within the bounds of statistical probability. The Crew members are the main characters in an adventure story; thus,

the most unusual and interesting things in the universe happen to them on a regular basis. Dramatic logic entitles you to use the holodeck malfunction as a plot device; like any device, though, you must take care not to overuse it. If your players start to rib you about your reliance on this or any other narrative trick, it's time to take it out of rotation for a while.

Holodeck malfunctions raise the stakes by threatening harm to something real.

The most common malfunction is the loss of safety protocols. Safety protocols prevent the forcefields that give physical substance to the holograms from doing actual harm to any real individuals present on the deck. When the safety protocols are disengaged, a holographic Klingon warrior can kill you just as dead as a real one could. Thus the jeopardy for the main characters is just as acute in a non-virtual adventure: they can be injured or even killed.

Another malfunction useful for narrative purposes is the operator lock-out, wherein the computer no longer accepts commands. Typically, characters are trapped on the deck until they complete the adventure's programmed objective—they cannot order the holodeck to stop the simulation. Although not in jeopardy, the Crew has no choice but to finish the program. To add consequences to a lock-out, create a deadline in the real world. Make the players aware that something very bad will happen if the Crew is unable to finish the program in time to fulfill an important responsibility.

Possibly as an unforeseen consequence of the improvements to holodeck technology installed by the Bynars in 2364, or as a side-effect of interactions with strange energies, holodeck characters sometimes become self-aware. A self-aware hologram is no less individual and sentient than any other lifeform; anything that happens to such a being is permanent. Thus, any threat that jeopardizes a self-aware hologram can be interesting enough to serve as the basis for an entire episode, especially if the Crew comes to sympathize with the holographic character. Self-aware holograms provide you with opportunities to explore a theme common to *Star Trek*: what does it mean to be human? Not all sentient holograms will be benign; some might serve as the episode's antagonists. You'll need to provide them with a plausible means of threatening either the Crew members, or something of importance to them. However you use this malfunction, be sure to use it sparingly.

No matter which of these three malfunction types you choose, make sure that there is a unique, specific reason for any given systems failure when it occurs. Malfunctions may be brought about by sabotage, contact with spatial or temporal anomalies or as a result of damage to the ship during a surprise attack. Attributing the malfunction to a random, uninteresting glitch simply makes your use of a plot device obvious. As Narrator, your job is to disguise the gears and mechanisms of storytelling construction as best you can, assisting the players in their identification with their characters and suspension of disbelief. If other

characters (who need not be player characters) can work to discover and counter the cause of the malfunction as the holo-adventure continues, it will seem much more credible.

HUMOROUS EPISODES

One of the fun things about holodeck episodes is that they provide a reason for long-running Crew members to act in ways contrary to their established characters. Because out-of-character behavior is a cornerstone of comedy, holodeck episodes naturally lend themselves to humorous change-of-pace episodes. These are best used to lighten your players' moods after a particularly somber episode or story arc.

Humor can also derive from a spoof or homage to a beloved genre. Feel free to play the clichés of the genre in question to the hilt. For example, the episode "The Big Goodbye," detailing Captain Picard's trip as Dixon Hill into the world of hardboiled detective fiction, delights in the stock characters and situations of that genre. (We delve further into genre conventions later in this chapter.)

Even humorous episodes need a reason for the players to care; note that "The Big Goodbye" features an operator lockout trapping Picard and company inside the simulation until the story is finished.

Humorous genre homages don't always need a holodeck; the *Enterprise* crew's adventure as Robin Hood and His Merry Men ("Qpid") was perpetrated as a practical joke by the god-like Q.

BACKGROUND ELEMENT

In the TV show, the holodeck occurs more often as a background element than as the focus of an entire episode. This allows series writers to take advantage of the many dramatic uses of the holodeck (as listed

under "Holodeck Functions" on page 14) without overusing the holodeck malfunction as a plot device. As Narrator, you will likely want to use it in the same way.

RECURRING ELEMENT

A holodeck program appearing in one episode can recur later. You can make repeated use of a program that appears as a background element: Worf's combat training simulation is a prime example. A program that served as the main focus of an episode can recur as a background element later; the Dixon Hill program reappeared as a background element in a couple of episodes subsequent to the "The Big Goodbye," the episode in which it was the main focus.

Showing characters reusing programs fosters a sense of continuity, and also indicates that Crewmembers lead lives between emergencies, making them seem more real and believable. It also sheds light on the Crewmember's personality. The downside of repeating elements is that they may become tiresome through overexposure; if you're often reusing any plot element, make sure that the players are as fond of it as you are. (This advice is pertinent to any character or situation, on or off the holodeck.)

A recurring holodeck program can add spice to the opening scene of an adventure. Instead of having all of the Crewmembers performing routine duties on the bridge when danger rears its head, some characters can instead be off taking part in a holonovel scene. (The Narrator can use this scene to foreshadow upcoming events, as well. See "Theme," below, and page 40 of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Narrator's Toolkit*.)

Holodeck programs can give the Crew something interesting to do while other PCs take the center of attention in a storyline. A Crewmember with no diplo-



matic skills can head off to play out a chapter in his favorite holonovel during a negotiation sequence, for example. You must carefully decide whether to allow this extraneous activity to be fully played out, or just referred to. Keep it in the background if you're uncomfortable splitting up the action between different groups of players, or if the content of the program is at odds with the mood or theme of the episode's primary storyline.

HOLODECK FUNCTIONS

The holodeck is a highly versatile narrative tool, because it allows series writers to obey the cardinal rule of dramatic storytelling: show, don't tell. They use holodeck sequences to visually dramatize things that could otherwise be communicated with dialogue or (even more deadly to the story) voice-over monologues to show inner thought.

Although you don't have access to the sets, costumes and actors that make the holodeck work visually, you can still make use of the holodeck to breathe life into the scenes that establish character, provide necessary information, and perform other basic storytelling functions.

CHARACTERIZATION

The most important narrative function of the holodeck is to reveal character; the holodeck programs most often used by various Crew members show us something important about the character's interests, personality and motivations, and does so in a visually memorable way. Data's creation of a comedy cabaret highlights his desire to be more human, showing him trying to puzzle out the mysteries of the thing called a sense of humor. Worf's combat simulation program shows us how important his fighting skills are to him; its utilitarian nature suggests his disinterest in fictional flights of fancy.

One popular category of holodeck program allows the user to interact with simulated versions of historical greats. The particular historical figures a character chooses to chat with reveals something about his personality. When we see Data playing poker with Isaac Newton and Stephen Hawking, we learn something important about him—who his heroes are.

Sometimes, when faced with inner conflicts they can't bring themselves to share with their fellow officers, Crewmembers instead confide in holodeck characters. This allows them to hash through questions with a sympathetic listener with a guarantee of absolute privacy. In dramatic terms, these scenes dramatize characters' thoughts so that you and your players can see them played out as part of the game. An example of this can be seen in several *Voyager* episodes, in which Captain Janeway, unwilling to show doubt in front of her officers, consults a holographic Leonardo da Vinci.

Just as the *Enterprise* crew serve as the protagonists of the *TNG* show, the PCs are the main focus of your

game. Encourage your players to design holodeck programs just as revealing of their characters' personalities as the above examples. (For more on player-created programs, see page 38.)

This technique is too useful to leave exclusively to the player characters, though. Let's say you have a plot line that derives its urgency from a threat to a Supporting Cast officer. You could begin the episode with a scene in which the PCs participate in that officer's favorite holodeck program. This gives the players an understanding of the character, which in turn will make them care about him when he is endangered.

Or maybe you're planning an episode in which the actions of a Supporting Cast officer lead to the central crisis of the episode. In this case, you can use a prologue set on the holodeck to provide a clue to his personality, one which can be used to help resolve the crisis.

MOOD

Use the holodeck to enhance the mood of a scene. A romantic scene is better set on a beautiful, moonlit beach than against a bulkhead or in a cargo bay. If you want to show a character relaxing, why not describe him getting a backrub from a masseuse with webbed hands or luxuriating in the warmth of a Tiburonese mud bath?

If you want to build tension during an episode of conflict, precede an expected battle in the real world with a holodeck exercise that goes badly, increasing your players' anxiety level.

The above techniques work when you need to get the players into the mood you want to create. Sometimes, though, they'll get too caught up in the mood of an adventure. If they're getting frustrated or depressed because they can't see how to solve a problem, perhaps you can steer them towards a light-hearted or tension-relieving scene in the holodeck.

EXPOSITION

Exposition is background information you need in order to follow a fictional plot and understand the actions of its characters. Providing exposition to an audience in an interesting way is always a challenge; it is especially so in science fiction, which always requires extra information about an invented setting far from our everyday experience. Exposition is normally handled through dialogue. The holodeck, however, allows us to bring background facts into the foreground—again, you can use it to show, instead of tell. Mental images are always easier to remember, and have greater impact than, abstract ideas.

BACKSTORY

The most basic type of exposition is called backstory. This is scriptwriter's jargon for past events in a character's history that explains his current behavior.

Your characters can make their backstories come to life by incorporating them into holodeck programs. When Captain Picard meets an old flame in “We’ll Always Have Paris,” their crucial scene together occurs on the holodeck, in a simulation of the café where they first fell in love.

Backstory can also refer to past events that drive the current action. Holodeck simulations can recap these events in a compelling manner. The drama of the episode “Descent, Part I” requires the characters (and therefore, the audience) feel the emotional impact of a Borg attack on the planet Ohniaka III; the story accomplishes this through a holodeck program that simulates its aftermath.

Following a tradition established in the first series, *Star Trek* characters often find themselves on trial when falsely accused of crimes. Courtroom dramas like this are highly reliant on expository dialogue. Holodeck simulations enliven these stories, allowing you to describe various competing crime scene simulations as they unfold in front of the characters’ eyes. See the episode “A Matter of Perspective,” in which Riker defends himself against a trumped-up murder charge, for an example of this technique in action.

CULTURAL

Alien cultures demand more expository detail than almost any other element of the *Star Trek* setting. The holodeck provides you with a quick, dramatic way to illustrate an alien species’, or character’s, background. A scene set in a holographic recreation of a Klingon monastery shows the players more about Klingon culture than any amount of straight explanation you can reel off. Instead of simply describing the Klingons as rough, tradition-bound warriors who revere the ancient hero Kahless the Unforgettable, you can describe the barbaric-looking stone and metal throne in the midst of the monastery of Boreth, surrounded by burning candles, beneath a gigantic portrait of Kahless, who swings a blood-drenched *bat’leth*.

With the aid of the holodeck, alien characters can recreate cultural rituals even if their species is poorly represented aboard their particular ships. They can pay virtual visits to their homeworlds, participate in their national sports or take part in holographic narratives based on their own unique literary genres. Any of these scenes would serve to make the alien cultures presented in your game more vivid and immediate.

THEME

Holodeck scenes can enhance the meaning of an episode by reinforcing its basic theme.

You can foreshadow your theme by presenting a holodeck scene that echoes a situation which will later confront one of the Crew members. This is known as foreshadowing (see page 40 of *The Star Trek: The Next Generation Narrator’s Toolkit*). An episode revolving around the difficulty of decision-making might kick off with a holodeck recreation of a

relevant scene from *Hamlet*, whose title character is famously hesitant to complete an act of vengeance against his father’s murderer. Similarly, negotiations with a holographic Nicki the Nose in a Dixon Hill novel could presage negotiations with a newly discovered alien species.

On the other hand, you might want to use a holodeck scene to provide a contrast to later events in your storyline. If your theme is cultural misunderstanding, you could start the episode with a holonovel that portrays an alien species in accordance with common Federation misconceptions about it. When the Crewmembers find themselves actually interacting with individuals of that species, they’ll have occasion to reflect on the differences between the standard portrayal and the reality of the alien culture.

THE STAKES

Holodeck scenes can enhance the drama by emphasizing the stakes of an adventure. Let’s say that you’ve come up with a storyline to challenge one of the Crew members by testing one of his most sacred beliefs. If we see him undergo an easy test of that belief during a holonovel chapter, you’ll remind the players of how important it is to him. This will make the climactic scene, in which he’s faced with severe pressures to abandon that belief, more powerful.

If your plot revolves around a threat to a distant person, place or thing, close that distance by letting your characters meet or interact with the target of the threat on the holodeck. If the Crew is assigned to recover a precious work of art from Orion smugglers, let them get a good look at the holographic version of the item, so they know how beautiful and important it is.

PLOT DEVICES

The holodeck can have more prosaic functions as an element in your stories. A few examples of these follow.

DECEPTION

Holodeck technology can be used for deception, especially when the people being deceived are unaware of its existence. For example, in the episode “Homeward,” Worf’s half-brother masterminds an operation to use holographic imaging to rescue the Boraalans, a pre-contact people he is studying, from the imminent destruction of their homeworld. While they’re *en route* to a new homeworld, holograms convince all but one of the Boraalans that they’re merely undertaking a long journey across their planets’ surface. Much of the drama of the episode arises from the debatable ethics of this scheme (which violates the Prime Directive) and its consequences to the unfortunate Boraalan who discovers the truth.

Although most Starfleet officers are uncomfortable with deception as a tactic, you may create adventures in which it is justified, either to accomplish a higher

goal, or against enemies whose threat to others outweighs holo-ethical concerns.

Certain cultures opposed to the Federation, however, are perfectly willing to exploit its deceptive qualities. Cardassian intelligence officers may interrogate prisoners in holosuits programmed to increase the sufferer's fear and anxiety. Strong-willed characters may resist more conventional tortures, but break when an innocent is threatened with harm—without knowing the potential victim is only a holographic image.

Romulans use even more sophisticated methods of extracting information; they may kidnap a subject and place him in a holographic simulation of his daily life in hopes of manipulating him into revealing sensitive information. Often the victims of this technique never realize that it's even been used against them.

Ferengi have been known to trick business partners into unknowingly entering a holosuite in the course of a negotiation. They may make their goods appear more desirable, beguile clients with offers from non-existent rivals, or subtly confuse the victim's senses so that he is unable to devote his full concentration to the fine print.

TRAINING

What better place to carry on training exercises than in a holodeck? Starfleet's standard bridge officer examination, for example, includes a holodeck simulation, which the candidate must successfully solve in order to qualify for promotion. Standard exercises like these are likely to appear as background scenes in your campaign; use them to dramatize, and add suspense to, the promotions process.

In addition to standard training procedures, the Crew may use holodeck programs to rehearse difficult operations—provided the information on the subject is sufficient to create an accurate simulation. Handled properly, these scenes can add suspense to your game; what happens when the simulation goes off without a hitch, but the away team runs into a surprise during the actual operation?

Alternately, if the players become frustrated by their inability to solve a particular problem, the holodeck gives their characters the opportunity to rehearse various solutions with no consequences, until they get it right. For example, if they can't figure out how to get the ship out of an energy-draining booby-trap (as in the episode "Booby Trap"), the Crew can run several simulations until they find a solution.

THERAPY

Injured characters may go to the holodeck to help heal mental or even physical disorders incurred during play. As Narrator, you can use the holodeck as a plot device to explain the speedy or miraculous healing of characters to get them back into the action quickly, or even save them from an untimely death.

Sometimes a Crewmember relates better to a holographic character than to a ship's counselor. When confronted by strange dreams, for example, Data consulted a holographic version of pioneering psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud.

A pleasing holodeck environment can improve a patient's mental state and aid in his recovery. A holographic cottage next to a sun-dappled trout stream provides a more congenial convalescence than the sterile confines of sick bay.

The forcefield technology underlying the holodeck can, in a pinch, have surprising medical applications. In the *Voyager* episode "Phage," Neelix is, as a temporary life-saving measure, outfitted with a pair of lungs extracted from a holographic recreation of himself.

CREATING HOLONOVELS

Now that we've discussed how to use the holodeck in your adventures, it's time to think about designing adventures to take place there. In other words, this section shows Narrators how to create the holonovel programs Crewmembers can use in the various ways we've so far described.

GENRE

The first question to ask yourself when creating a holonovel is what genre it falls into. A genre is a set of storytelling conventions that places a story within a category known to the audience. It allows a degree of immediate familiarity. Some of the common genres described below include the western, the hardboiled detective story, and the spy story.

A holonovel's genre gives participants an initial set of expectations about its narrative before they start the program: it indicates what kind of personas they'll adopt, the types of fictional characters they'll interact with, the sorts of settings they'll get to explore, and the costumes they'll need to replicate before showing up at the holodeck's entranceway. Genre also suggests the goals of the personae, and the basic moral assumptions governing their behavior within the confines of the program.

ELEMENTS OF GENRE

Here's the key to the breakdown this section uses to describe each genre.

EXAMPLES

The best shorthand to describe a genre is to list a few well-known fictional works that typify it.

IMAGERY

Here we list the visual cues most identified with the genre, including costumes and sets.

THEMES

Ideas and conflicts typically explored in the genre are listed here.

STOCK CHARACTERS

Certain basic character types appear again and again in any given genre. Some of these characters will be played by characters in your series—the player characters. Some of them will be played by you, as holographic Supporting Cast characters. We assign a name to each character type, describe their basic appearance and demeanor, suggest their role in the story, and provide a catchphrase to give you a feel for the character type. Not every character type will be appropriate for your holonovel.

PLOT DEVICES

This entry lists the common developments and conflicts of the genre. You do not have to include all these elements in your plot, but you should include some—otherwise your story won't be recognizable as taking part in the genre.

Remember, these are generalizations for the purposes of creating fun holodeck adventures for *Star Trek*. Most classic genre stories depart from type in one way or another; that's what makes them stand out.

POPULAR GENRES

After a quick look at the genres listed here, you'll note that they're all from the literature of Earth, and most are movie or literary genres popular at some point in the 20th century. New genres developed on Earth from the 21st century onward and alien cultures with sophisticated storytelling traditions also claim their own unique forms. Since you and your players hail from the 20th century, though, you'll find it easier to recreate genres with which you're already familiar. If you're feeling ambitious enough to invent a fictional genre from an imaginary culture, by all means give it a try—but your players won't know what to expect, and could be easily confused. So while the characters in the setting are probably familiar with a wide variety of futuristic genres, your players will likely be sticking to the accessible stuff.

Note that the denizens of the 24th century regard our familiar genres as quaint or exotic. Simple details a 20th century audience would take for granted—like the use of paper currency or driving a car—will surprise and delight 24th century characters. Historians may know the difference between the real 1940s San Francisco and the exaggerated-for-entertainment-purposes version found in the Dixon Hill adventures, but many people are prone to treat their holographic experiences as accurate recreations of past time periods.

CHIVALROUS DERRING-DO

EXAMPLES

Ivanhoe: novel, Sir Walter Scott. *The Adventures of Robin Hood*: movie, starring Errol Flynn. *Excalibur*: movie, directed by John Boorman. *Brother Cadfael*: series of mystery novels by Ellis Peters.

IMAGERY

Knights in shining armor. Maidens wearing courtly raiment. Castles and catapults. Banquet tables laden with grilled mutton. Dank dungeons bristling with crude implements of torture. Chandeliers to swing on, and moats to jump. Witches, real or imagined. Pyres for the burning of heretics. Sylvan glades untouched by man; mist-shrouded lakes.

THEMES

Romance between lovers separated by courtly obligations. The battle against unjust rule. Personal honor.

STOCK CHARACTERS

THE BAD KING

A petulant tyrant unable to stomach any threat to his authority. He may be a usurper, or just a poor ruler. Can either be a skilful combatant or a spoiled, overgrown child.

Appearance: Dark hair and beard, usually greasy. May be a well-muscled combatant or a corpulent decadent. Attired in the finest robes and jewels, which contrast with the poverty of the oppressed peasants.

Catchphrase: "Arrest that man!"

THE GOOD KING

A wise and kindly ruler, with an idealistic plan doomed by betrayal or the inevitable forces of decay.

Appearance: Handsome, he may either be a youthful Adonis or a charming father figure with graying temples. Modestly attired given his rank, but with a few choice pieces of manly jewelry.

Catchphrase: "Your loyalty honors and humbles me."

THE HIGH SHERIFF

A lackey to the bad king; may be a strutting bully or a cunning sophisticate. A secondary antagonist who does the villain's dirty work.

Appearance: Well-armed and armored. Facial features may be a squarish and rough-hewn, or refined yet subtly sinister.

Catchphrase: "I'll catch you yet!"

THE NOBLE MAIDEN

A pure-hearted young woman of noble birth; may be lady in waiting to the bad king's queen. She sympathizes with the oppressed peasantry; loves the hero.

Appearance: Willowy, virginal, with long, flaxen hair. Garbed in long medieval dress.

Catchphrase: "But I can let you into the palace!"

THE KINDLY FRIAR

A man of the church who uses his protected status to help the heroes. A learned man with a sense of justice. His considerable girth may disguise formidable abilities as a combatant.

Appearance: Portly, tonsured, and robed. Rounded facial features.

Catchphrase: "You'll find the key baked inside the loaf of bread."

THE MAGICIAN

This character is typically a wizard or alchemist, whose primitive science seems like occult power to the unwashed, or a half-crazy woman who preserves the ancient secrets of the old religion. The magician advises the heroes, but suffers a tragic fate, as the days of magic are passing.

Appearance: Robed, wears an unusual hat (conical or skullcap), long, spidery fingers; caterpillar eyebrows, beard.

Catchphrase: "There's more than one way to skin a cat, my lord."

THE TRAITOROUS KNIGHT

A well-bred but cruel noble whose personal demons drive him to betray the good king. He is a dangerous opponent in gleaming armor, with a quick, sharp sword.

Appearance: Handsome—too handsome. Golden hair, cold steel eyes.

Catchphrase: "You'll rue the day you crossed me!"

PLOT DEVICES

The high sheriff's men abuse the peasantry. The bad king holds the noble maiden hostage. The magician communicates a dire prophecy to the good king. The hero and the traitorous knight settle an important affair by jousting. The bad king lures the hero into a trap.

CLIFFHANGER

EXAMPLES

Flash Gordon: movie serial, Universal Studios. *Perils of Nyoka*: movie serial, Republic Studios. *Indiana Jones series*: movies, directed by Stephen Spielberg.

IMAGERY

The cliffhanger is more a style into which the trappings of other genres can be shoehorned—from westerns to science fiction. Fast-paced action, fresh-scrubbed heroes, death traps, chases, very long fight sequences in which the combatants do a lot of rolling around on the floor together.

THEMES

Good vs. evil in its simplest form.

STOCK CHARACTERS

THE HERO

He opposes evil because that is what heroes do. Possible professions, when not battling evil, include: singing cowboy, college student, newspaper reporter, pilot, explorer or hunter.

Appearance: Young, athletic and handsome. Simply clad in the proper period garb, and ready for action.

Catchphrase: "That's just the way I was brought up, ma'am."

THE GIRL

The young woman who gets caught up in the villain's scheme—and the hero's arms. Although independent by the standards of 1930s-40s, she is nonetheless in constant need of rescue. She's the target of the villain's sinister plot by connection to her father; see below.

Appearance: Young, demure, pretty.

Catchphrase: "Eeeee!"

THE FATHER

Wise, kindly old gent who has something—a formula, a secret, a deed—that the villain needs to complete his nefarious plan for world domination. Only his daughter and her new boyfriend can help him. May not survive past the introductory episode.

Appearance: Frail, white-haired, bespectacled, cardigan sweater, comfy old slippers, pipe.

Catchphrase: "Save yourselves; I'll hold them off as long as I can."

THE SIDEKICK

The hero's male buddy, who may be present for comedy relief, or may need rescue in the episodes where The Girl does not. Serves as the good guy's sounding board and greatest admirer.

Appearance: Less handsome, young and/or vigorous than the hero.

Catchphrase: "Gosh, that sure was smart of you!"

THE VILLAIN

A greedy cut-throat, a generation older than the hero. Wields an outsized vocabulary, a vaguely European accent, and a petulant temper. A firm believer in death traps; he never considers just shooting the hero.

Appearance: Tall, goateed, dark-haired with graying temples, sunken eyes, widow's peak hairline, well-tailored suits, flower in lapel.

Catchphrase: "You've been a thorn in my side for far too long, but when that fuse reaches the fire cracker that will drop the acid pellets into the solution in the barrel, your effrontery will be at an end!"

THE MENACE

An exotic source of physical jeopardy for the hero and his entourage. Most likely a gorilla or robot. (The ethnic villains of the original period aren't found in the holonovel programs of the idealistic 24th century.)

Appearance: Big and curiously expressionless. Furry, with big teeth (in case of gorilla) or metallic and shaped kind of like a man-sized mailbox.

Catchphrase: "Arrrhh!"

PLOT DEVICES

The villain sends the menace to kill the hero or kidnap the girl. The hero must rescue the girl from the villain. The villain places the hero and the girl in a fiendish trap. The sidekick's simple desires lead him to blunder into danger. The father designs a device to save the day-provided it works.

COP SHOW

EXAMPLES

TV series: *NYPD Blue*, *Homicide*, *Starsky and Hutch*. Movies: *Beverly Hills Cop*, *48 hrs*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Across 110th Street*. Novels: *the 87th precinct series*, by Ed McBain.

IMAGERY

Messy, crowded squad rooms. Gritty, garbage-strewn streets. Grim interrogation rooms with two-way mirrors. Tiny holding cells. Plainclothes detectives in off-the-rack suits. Street hustlers showing off tacky threads. Uniformed cops, rubber gloves, and evidence bags. Yellow police tape. Coroner's examination room, wall to wall with sheet-strewn bodies.

THEMES

Crime and punishment. Law versus justice. The cop's wife/girlfriend/family doesn't understand his mission.

STOCK CHARACTERS

THE MAVERICK COP

He's tough, streetwise, and plays by his own rules. Takes risks, becomes obsessed by cases his superiors consider closed, sometimes gets a little rough in the interrogation room.

Appearance: Slovenly, but in a good way. Leather jacket, jeans, sunglasses.

Catchphrase: "I'm all over you, dirtball."

THE PARTNER

A good, honest cop who helps the maverick hero. A settled family man with a cautious approach to life and a keen awareness of what the procedure is supposed to be.

Appearance: Paunchy, balding, either dressed much better or much worse than the hero.

Catchphrase: "Are you crazy? The lieutenant'll have your badge for that!"

A sub-group of this type is the Soon-To-Be Ex-Partner, who is a few weeks away from retirement, plans to buy a boat and cruise around the Caribbean and has a life expectancy measured in hours.

Appearance: As above, but may model Hawaiian shirt for hero during establishing scene.

Catchphrase: "I'm... fading... fast... promise me... you'll get the guy...!"

THE DEMANDING LIEUTENANT

He's hard-nosed, by-the-book and shouts constantly. Pressures the maverick cop to deliver; threatens him with suspension when he breaks the rules, but grudgingly covers for him with the brass.

Appearance: Best-dressed man in the squad-room.

Catchphrase: "This morning alone I've gotten three calls on this from the mayor's office!"

THE STOOL PIGEON

Provides the heroes with important information, but only after venting a stream of complaints until the heroes cheerfully harass him back onto the topic. Sniffs frequently, blinks his red-rimmed eyes.

Appearance: Skinny, shifty-looking, unkempt.

Catchphrase: "Not a chance! If word got out I fingered that guy, I'd be dead in minutes."

THE PERP

In a realistic cop drama, he's a low-rent creep too stupid to outmaneuver the cops when they finally haul him in for interrogation.

Appearance: Like the stool pigeon, but his messy clothes were bad choices to start with.

Catchphrase: "I didn't do it!"

In a more action-oriented story, he's a cold-blooded killer with dozens of machine-gun wielding punks at his disposal.

Appearance: Expensive suits, mirrored sunglasses, carries briefcase (or has a thug carry it for him).

Catchphrase: "Talk to my attorney."

PLOT DEVICES

The cops engage in a car chase with the perps. The cops chase the perps on foot, having to scale at least one alleyway chain-link fence in the process. The partner gets shot. The stool pigeon contacts the heroes with an urgent message; they find him dead. The demanding lieutenant hauls in the cops to yell at them. The well-connected perp uses political pressure to have the case prematurely closed.

GOTHIC

EXAMPLES

Novels: *Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, *Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. TV show: *Dark Shadows*. Movies: *Rebecca*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, *Dragonwyck*, directed by Joseph L. Manckiewicz, *Gothic*, directed by Ken Russell.

IMAGERY

Drafty castles, haunted mansions, rain-slicked ruins. Ghosts, mysterious noises, cobwebs, dripping candles. Paintings whose eyes seem to follow you around the room. Coaches drawn by teams of coal-black horses, clattering through the night. Costuming: aristocratic European garb of the 18th and 19th centuries.

THEMES

The secrets of the past return to haunt the present. Love and hate mixed together. Modern rationalism versus the supernatural. The virtuous resist the sinful.

STOCK CHARACTERS

THE ROMANTIC ANTI-HERO

A brooding nobleman whose smoldering charisma is inseparable from his turbulent emotions and terrible secrets. His soul is the prize in a tug-of-war between the forces of doom and decay, as represented by the old dark house, and the forces of light and optimism, as embodied by the pure-hearted woman who struggles to redeem him.

Appearance: Handsome, richly attired in period style. Mane of dark hair, pensive features.

Catchphrase: "Oh, I do not deserve your love! If only you could truly see the burning pitch at the core of my blackened heart."

THE ROMANTIC VILLAIN

Like the above, but there really is burning pitch at the core of his blackened heart.

THE NEW BRIDE

Well-educated, virginal young woman, either a middle-class girl married above her station, or the offspring of an impoverished noble family. Her demure demeanor conceals the fiery passions that stir deep within her bosom. She represents light and life in a world fraught with premonitions of darkness and death. (Sometimes she enters the dark house not as a bride, but as a new servant of some sort—often a governess.)

Appearance: Pretty but modest frock. Hair tied up in a bun. Wears cameo necklace.

Catchphrase: "But don't you see—love is a power greater than all others!"

THE FAMILY RETAINER

A household servant intimately familiar with the terrible history of the family and its dark house. Tries to drive the heroine away or protect her from the place's horrible secrets. May be part of the resident evil, or merely a victim of the house's oppressive atmosphere.

Appearance: Grim-visaged, clad in worn servants' livery.

Catchphrase: "There are things that should never be exposed to the light of day."

THE LUNATIC

A gabbling, frothing-at-the-mouth maniac driven mad by the dark house. If a member of the family, is kept imprisoned in an attic, secret room or basement. Escapes at night to do inexplicable things that terrorize the heroine.

Appearance: Crazy expression, unkempt hair, dressed in rags. May have manacles to rattle.

Catchphrase: [Sound of distant moaning.]

THE VOICE OF REASON

A local professor, constable, doctor or other representative of sanity and rationalism who pays social visits to the house. An avuncular fellow who says "don't mind if I do" to a little snifter of brandy now and again. Tries to reassure the heroine, but is unprepared for the impotence of the scientific method in the face of the ancient evils of the dark house.

Appearance: Middle-aged or older, smokes a pipe, wears tweed, may sport monocle or tyrolean hat.

Catchphrase: "But surely you lend no credence to such patently absurd superstitions."

PLOT DEVICES

Symptoms of haunting plague the old house. The heroine catches the family retainer in hiding things from her. The lunatic escapes and causes trouble. The new bride falls in love with the romantic hero/anti-hero/villain. At the end, a calamity destroys the old house. The voice of reason, in trying to reassure the heroine, simply heightens her anxieties.

MYSTERY

EXAMPLES

Fiction: *The Hercule Poirot* and *Miss Marple* series by Agatha Christie; the *Sherlock Holmes* stories by Arthur Conan Doyle; the *Jim Chee / Joe Leaphorn* series by Tony Hillerman. TV shows: *Murder, She Wrote*; *Diagnosis Murder*.

IMAGERY

In the classic English-style mystery, a crime occurs in genteel surroundings. Drawing rooms, first-class hotels, country estates, luxury apartments. Classic cars: Studebakers, Bugattis, Rolls Royces. Murder scenes littered with the finest in decorative arts: Spode or Wedgewood china, Lalique crystal, furniture named after various French kings.

In the hardboiled tradition, trenchcoat-clad private dicks wait in low-rent offices, nursing shots of bourbon while waiting for fine-looking dames to come through the door and give them assignments which turn out to be more than they bargained for. They navigate a world of poker-faced cops, cauliflower-eared mugs, decadent tycoons, and mobbed-up Hollywood bottom-feeders. The solution to the mystery may take a back seat to the existential journey of the detective as he tries to walk the mean streets without himself being corrupted by them.

In many modern mystery series, the detective solves crimes in a specialized milieu, anything from a Navajo reservation (Tony Hillerman) to ancient Rome (Lindsey Davis' *Falco* series). Or the detective may be distinguished by his day job as a coroner, rabbi, child psychologist or caterer. The imagery in each case flows from the distinguishing feature of the series.

THEMES

Violence and evil lurk behind the placid surfaces of everyday life. Murder will out. Puzzles are fun to solve. Amateurs are smarter than professionals. Eccentricity beats out conventional thinking.

STOCK CHARACTERS

THE DETECTIVE

Smart, unconventional, dogged, adventurous and with a passion for the truth, the detective can be any-



one from a black building owner in pre-Civil Rights Los Angeles to a trench-coated private eye to an archaeologist.

Appearance: Varies widely.

Catchphrase: "There's something amiss here..."

THE SIDEKICK

He is friend or companion of the detective who gives him (or her) someone with whom to talk over the case, or to track down clues while the detective is otherwise occupied. More sedentary detectives depend on their sidekicks for physical confrontations with the bad guys.

Appearance: Contrasts with that of the detective, often by being drabber or more conventional.

Catchphrase: "But how did you know he was the killer?"

INSPECTOR PLODDER

A police officer assigned to solve the case, who is present to be thoroughly shown up by the detective. If the detective is a police officer, this role is taken by a rival or superior on the force.



Appearance: Uniformed or plainclothes police outfit, as appropriate. Has a long, mournful face, bearing a perpetually confused expression.

Catchphrase: "I don't need you getting in the way, understand?"

THE SUSPECTS

Each installment of the detective's adventures includes a wide array of characters with varying backgrounds and attitudes. The only thing they have in common is good reason to have killed the victim.

Appearance: Wide range of contrasting visual types: seductresses sit across from dowagers; retired military men stand next to raffish ne'er-do-wells; and so on.

Catchphrase: "Sure I hated him. Everyone did. But I didn't kill him."

PLOT DEVICES

In the hardboiled tradition, a shot rings out in a darkened room. In the English-style mystery, the victim dies by some obscure method—snake venom in a snifter of brandy, severed brake lines, an heirloom used as a bludgeon. The detective makes a brilliant deduction, to the sidekick's amazement. The sidekick

chases a mysterious figure, who eludes him. Inspector Plodder arrests the obvious suspect, who obviously didn't do it.

All means of communication and ways of escape from the isolated location get cut off. A guy with a gun comes through the door. One of the suspects is found dead. The detective gathers the suspects together to announce the identity of the killer.

ROMANCE

EXAMPLES

Fiction: novels by Danielle Steele, *Bridges of Madison County* by Robert James Waller, *Message in a Bottle* by Nicholas Sparks. Movies: *An Affair to Remember*, with Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr, *When Harry Met Sally* with Meg Ryan and Billy Crystal, *All That Heaven Allows*, directed by Douglas Sirk.

IMAGERY

Two stunningly attractive people. Wine glasses, wool sweaters, the beach at twilight, golden sunlight, golden retrievers. Soft focus photography, love songs on the stereo. Pearl necklaces.

THEMES

Love is tested by adversity. Fear of love is the greatest barrier of all. Cruel fate separates lovers. Crippling social conventions impede true happiness. Love conquers all boundaries (whether social, cultural, or economic).

STOCK CHARACTERS

THE WOMAN

Smart, sensitive and a little introverted, the heroine is lonely and fears that love will pass her by. She might be young and inexperienced, thirtyish with the sound of a ticking clock in mind, or a middle-aged widow or unhappy wife who has given up on grand passion.

Appearance: Pretty, demure, wholesome. Sweaters, skirts, attractive but modest hairdos.

Catchphrase: "I can never be sure what he's really thinking when he looks at me like that."

THE MAN

A rugged, taciturn exterior conceals a passionate heart only the heroine can unlock. The man has been stung by love, or for some other reason has adjusted himself to a solitary life with no room for romance.

Appearance: Tall, broad-shouldered, handsomely weathered features. Wears sweaters, leather jackets; sports a generally outdoorsy look.

Catchphrase: "I don't know what to say."

THE CONFIDANT

A friend to whom the heroine can pour out her torment as barriers keep her from reaching the hero. Vivacious yet unconventional. She expresses her wisdom and perspective through sarcastic wit.

The man does not share his feelings with a confidant. He goes for walks with his trusty canine pal, works on his boat or throws himself into his work.

Appearance: Less conventionally attractive than the heroine.

Catchphrase: "Love is like being on fire, and right now, kid, you need to be wrapped in a blanket and rolled around on the floor."

PLOT DEVICES

The man and woman meet in a situation where they can't express their instant attraction for one another. Someone's parents disapprove of the possible relationship. The woman finds out something about the man, leading her to worry that he doesn't love her or can't be with her. The man goes away without telling the woman where he's gone; she suspects the worst, even though there's an innocent explanation. Woman pours out her doubts to the confidant, who urges her to take a chance on love. While angry with one another, man and woman find themselves thrust into an incredibly romantic situation together.

SPY

EXAMPLES

Movies: the *James Bond* series, *Our Man Flint*, *Sneakers*, Hitchcock's *39 Steps* and *North by Northwest*. TV: *Mission: Impossible*, *The Avengers*.

IMAGERY

These are action-oriented stories, usually tongue-in-cheek. Fights, chase sequences, globe-trotting luxury. Exotic gadgets and weaponry. Cartoonish villains who plot world domination. Libidinous activity abounds; unlikely temptresses appear clad in little more than a risqué pun.

THEMES

The good, the suave and the cool vs. the evil, mad and uncouth.

STOCK CHARACTERS

THE SECRET AGENT

An impossibly cool man of action with nerves of steel and a killer instinct. He's equally comfortable at a baccarat table, behind the wheel of a careening Aston-Martin, or pulling the trigger of his Walther PPK.

Appearance: Always attired in the height of fashion, handsome in a vaguely cruel way.

Catchphrase: (Come on, you know this one.)

THE CHIEF

Head of the hero's intelligence agency; he or she hands out the top-secret assignment, or appears to prod the secret agent to action. Well-tailored, erect-posture, cultivated manners and accent.

Appearance: Conservative business attire, fifty or sixty years old, intelligent features.

Catchphrase: "This one is for your eyes only."

THE HENCHMAN

A low-level thug expert in ways of applying physical harm. Often has an exotic gimmick: such as a special style of martial arts or a bizarre weapon.

Appearance: Varies widely, but always extreme: may be very large, very small, wildly ugly, stunningly beautiful...

Catchphrase: "I've waited a long time for this..." followed by sound of cracking knuckles.

THE VILLAIN

The shadowy mastermind whose operation the hero tries to destroy. In an adventure, he maintains an elaborate headquarters for the hero to blow up, weird henchmen for him to grapple with and a megalomaniacal plan to conquer the world.

Appearance: Affects outlandish dress, although a few conservative types stick with pinstriped suits. Has a distinguishing feature to rivet attention, such as a wandering eye, a streak of white hair, or a hook to replace an amputated hand.

Catchphrase: "Only you can appreciate the true brilliance of my plan; such a shame that I must kill you after I explain it to you."

THE TEMPTRESS

This seductive operative of the villain pumps the hero for information—or is it the other way around? Sometimes, she's the object of the mastermind's affections, sometimes she's also the henchman.

Appearance: Looks like a sinister fashion model; wears strapless evening gown and high heels or—when jumping out of a closet in the agent's hotel room—the latest in skimpy lingerie.

Catchphrase: "I don't know whether to kiss you or kill you. Maybe I'll do both."

THE GOOD GIRL

Much like the temptress, but works for the good guys. May be a curvaceous operative for a friendly intelligence agency, or, alternately, the mastermind's love interest (at least in his mind). Sometimes needs rescuing, sometimes rescues the hero.

Appearance: As per the temptress, but is also seen in modest, utilitarian clothes, and saves the lingerie for the denouement.

Catchphrase: "Maybe it is time our two agencies enjoyed... closer relations."

THE LAB COAT

This absent-minded professor appears early in a spy adventure to provide exposition about several gadgets he supplies to the heroes.

Appearance: Wears a lab coat, naturally. White hair, acid-spattered shoes, safety glasses.

Catchphrase: "No, not that button!"

PLOT DEVICES

The first sequence is a gratuitous action scene, sometimes unrelated to the rest of the story. The agent gets his briefing from the chief, in which he learns of a mysterious incident which he must investigate. Lab coat presents secret agent with exotic gadgets. Secret agent flirts with secretary, air hostess, female black-jack dealers, etc. Secret agent arrives in exotic locale, partakes in tourist activity, meets villain and seductress. The henchman attacks the secret agent and nearly kills him. Gadgets supplied by the lab coat find convenient uses in the course of the story. Seductress tries to seduce secret agent; may succeed but doesn't get what she really wants. Good girl turns out to be secret agent for another spy organization. Secret agent finds the villain's remote high-tech fortress and infiltrates it by allowing himself to be captured. Villain describes his fiendish plan to secret agent. The secret agent fights the henchman and wins. Great big gunfight in villain's complex as the countdown to self-destruct ticks away. Villain dies gruesomely, usually destroyed by his own super-weapon. Secret agent and good girl get together; double entendres ensue.

WESTERN

EXAMPLES

Movies: *Rio Bravo*, directed by Howard Hawks. *The Searchers*, directed by John Ford. *Silverado*, directed by Lawrence Kasdan. TV shows: *Wagon Train*, *Gunsmoke*, *Bonanza*. Books by Louis L'Amour, Larry McMurtry, Zane Grey.

IMAGERY

Stetsons, spurs, chaps and cowboy boots. Herds of longhorn. Branding irons. Colt .45 pistols and Winchester rifles. Dusty towns with one main drag, where the gunfights take place. Saloons equipped with dancing girls, grizzled prospectors, wagon-wheel chandeliers, out-of-tune pianos and all of the rotgut you can stomach. Corrals, trading posts and forts. Stunning vistas of the Old West.

THEMES

Tough frontier conditions test our heroes physically and morally. Righteousness in a lawless land. Human society stripped to its barest elements. Culture clash between settlers and natives.

STOCK CHARACTERS

THE LAWMAN

This local sheriff or Federal Marshal brings order to a lawless town, or protects a law-abiding town from bandits or outlaws. Quick with a gun, but fights only when forced to.

Appearance: Handsome, honest features, upright posture.

Catchphrase: "This is a civilized town; put them guns away."

THE GUNFIGHTER

Charismatic loner whose reputation for gunning down other men in shoot-outs encourages every darn fool with a pistol to call him out. Sometimes a brash yahoo in need of a good lesson in life, but more often



haunted by the violence he's done and trapped by the inevitability of his own demise.

Appearance: Dusty clothes, world-weary features, well-worn holsters.

Catchphrase: "I'm not lookin' for any trouble."

THE SALOON GAL

She sings and dances in the saloon. Has a soft spot for the marshal or sheriff despite her lawless status as a scarlet woman. She may be portrayed as a gambler or saloon owner, her true profession left unspoken.

Appearance: Painted lady poured into an alluring, corseted outfit trimmed with feathers.

Catchphrase: "I don't need you reminding me who I am."

THE SCHOOLMARM

One of the few honest women in town. Probably just arrived from out East. Shocked by the lawlessness of the West. Urges the hero to settle down and play it safe, or to stop the forces of evil threatening the town. If the hero is an outlaw, she tries to tame him.

Appearance: Pretty young woman in gingham frock and bonnet.

Catchphrase: "But Johnny, they'll kill you!"

THE OLD COOT

An old fella who speaks entirely in authentic frontier gibberish. Carries a rifle or shotgun, with which he may be surprisingly handy. Might be a drunk; if so, his promise to back up the hero motivates him to go on the wagon. His possible death at the hands of the bad guys may provoke a final confrontation between the hero and the villain.

Appearance: Grizzled, toothless, unshaven. Wears moth-eaten clothes.

Catchphrase: "By jiminy, if that don't beat all!"

THE CATTLE BARON

Rich villain who means to run all the honest folks out of the valley and buy up their land. May have many sons, who act as his henchmen; they're rasher than he is and apt to cause the trouble that sets the plot in motion.

Appearance: Middle-aged, burly, wears a black hat and a vest, perhaps with watch-chain.

Catchphrase: "Far as I'm concerned, there's two kinds of men: the kind I own, and the kind I break."

Alternately, he's a different kind of archetype—*The Bandit Leader*—in which case he means to rob the good folks of the town of their money. He doesn't like the Lawman simply because of what he represents.

He has dozens of banditos in his gang, all more mean than they are smart.

Appearance: Weathered, shifty-eyed, grimy from weeks spent living in the wilderness.

Catchphrase: "Hey Marshall! You let me an' my boys ride outta here, and I'll let these kids go."

THE NATIVE MENTOR

A wise old chief or shaman who teaches the hero the tricks he needs to survive in the vast wilderness, or who, using quasi-mystical parables, teaches him patience and common sense.

Appearance: Tall, elderly, long-haired, stony features, native garb.

Catchphrase: "The owl knows when to hunt... and when to sleep."

PLOT DEVICES

Shoot-out on the main drag of town. The cattle baron's men come to town and raise hell. Young hot-head or drunken fool starts fight with gunfighter, and won't back down. Schoolmarm warns hero not to be foolish. The stage coach comes to town; it's been robbed.

Big brawl in the saloon. Old coot catches one of the cattle baron's mean sneakin' around where he shouldn't, by cracky. Saloon gal gets shot helping the hero, clearing the way for his marriage to the schoolmarm. Gunfighter leaves town alone after killin' everybody what needs killin'.

OTHER GENRES

The above list of genres is just a starting point. Other classic genres you might want to draw inspiration from include the space opera, jungle adventure, comic-book style superheroes, Japanese giant monster movies or martial arts extravaganzas.

If you're a long-time roleplaying enthusiast, new holodeck adventures are as close as your shelf full of game books. Borrow adventures from other games and convert them to the Icon System. Be sure to pick a game that fits the Starfleet ethos, though; the idealistic spirit of *Star Trek* doesn't mesh well with tales in which Crewmembers assume the roles of angst-ridden creatures of the night, or knights and wizards who kill monsters and swipe their gold.

HOLOGRAPHIC STORYTELLING

24th century holographic storytellers draw from a range of different techniques to suit the particular stories they want to tell; in this way they're no different from the authors or TV scriptwriters of the present day. Each story sets out to create a certain mood; holoprogrammers choose story structures which best help them create those moods.



The interactivity level of a holonovel varies depending on these requirements: they may be free-form or directed. A free-form holonovel reacts to the actions of the participants, leaving them great flexibility in determining what conflicts will drive the story and how it will turn out. Detective stories, for example, need to give the characters great latitude to decide what to do next, since the fun of their narratives arises from the act of investigation. Directed holonovels restrict the characters' actions in order to keep the story true to the creator's vision, and to the expectations of the participants. They lead participants along, forcing them to react to the events of a fairly rigid storyline. Holonovels of horror and suspense, for example, offer fewer choices to participants, placing them in world of constrained action to evoke the sense of helplessness and diminishing control that makes a terror tale frightening. Even the most rigid directed story, however, can be changed by the participants as they issue commands to the computer running the program. Most participants refrain from doing this, as they know they may well dispel the emotion they've come to the holodeck to experience.

Most holonovels fall between these two extremes and are neither wholly free-form or completely directed.

PREMISE

Now that you've chosen the genre, it's time to get started creating your holodeck program. The first step is to choose a premise. The premise is a statement which can be summed up in a couple of sentences which name or suggest the story's genre, its protagonist, the problem he wants to solve, and the main obstacles that stand in his way.

The Narrator, Stan, knows that one of his players likes submarines; another likes 1950s movies. He decides to combine the two to tailor a holodeck adventure for them: a Cold War sub epic entitled Tigers of the Deep.

Choose a central character; you can create one out of whole cloth or use one from a previous holodeck adventure. This is your hero, or protagonist.

Stan creates a persona named Dick Fuller; he's a hard-bitten former WWII submarine commander. This will be the character played by one of the Crewmembers.

Then invent a problem that the character wants to solve.

Fuller will investigate the disappearance of a number of ships in the Bermuda Triangle.

Finally, come up with the most important factor making the problem difficult to solve—the central conflict. This factor is usually another character opposed to the protagonist's goal—your antagonist. Alternately, the main conflict could be with a force of nature, or even an inner flaw of the protagonist.

The ships are being sunk by a group of pirates who've stolen a submarine, which they dock in an ancient, abandoned complex beneath the ocean floor: the still-airtight ruins of the legendary lost city of Atlantis. The pirates, led by the exotic temptress Señora Yma Árbol, will fight to protect their lucrative operation.

SCENES

Now that you have a premise, the next step is to flesh out the plotline into a series of scenes that progressively develop the theme and characters towards a final climax that resolves a central conflict. A basic structure you can use to do this is laid out in this section.

This structure is not unlike the one you'd use to create a regular adventure set outside the holodeck. The difference here is that the characters know they're participating in a fictional story and are aware of the structure. This becomes especially important in situations in which all of the major roles, including those of the antagonists (who work to thwart the heroes) are played by Crewmembers. In these cases everyone has to know ahead of time how the story is meant to turn out. However, they also know that their actions can change the base storyline into something quite different, forcing the computer to "wing it" using its knowledge of genre and storytelling conventions.

Hook

The hook is an opening scene in which we meet the protagonist; he is presented with a problem and takes the first step towards solving it.

Holodeck hooks are simpler than in regular adventures; the PCs have chosen to participate in the story and want to go along with it; they should have no motivational dilemmas. The participant knows what her character's hooks are from reading the PADD briefings, or being told about them by another participant who has read the briefing. The knowledge that the story won't get past the first scene if he ignores the hook encourages him to play his part. If he's not interested in the hook supplied, he can command the program to alter it, or he can choose another holonovel with a character and situation more to his liking; otherwise, he's simply sits in the holodeck, hanging out in a fictional recreation.

Stan, the Narrator, sets the action in a sleazy watering hole in a Caribbean port, where the proprietor, Dick Fuller, finds himself at loose ends. The action opens when a surprise visitor comes through the door of Dick's bar—it's Buck Stragen, his old commanding officer. Stragen offers Fuller a dangerous freelance assignment: he'll be given a rusty old bolt-bucket of a decommissioned submarine called the Bengal in which to investigate the missing ships. He'll get the budget to put a crew together, and the assistance of a professor with experimental sonar equipment the Navy wants tested. The player playing Ensign Colville, who takes on the persona of Dick Fuller, recognizes the bait, and takes it. The adventure is on!

If your player chooses to ignore the story's hook, you'll either need to create a new hook on the spot which leads into the existing story, or improvise a new story to match the character's new motivations. If you're worried that this is tough to do, you should take the precaution of checking with your players to make sure they like the hook and situation before you do all the work of creating the rest of the story.

Climax

Now that you know what your first scene will be, skip ahead to the last scene, the climax. The climax is the final confrontation between the protagonist and the forces opposing him in the achievement of his goal. To make the conclusion of the story as exciting and suspenseful as possible, introduce one or more complicating factors that make the protagonist's struggle more difficult than expected. If you can, set the climax in an interesting or picturesque locale with striking visual details. The ideal climax also includes a surprise event that aids the protagonist just when things seem bleakest.

Your choice of genre may determine the nature of the climax: a spy adventure isn't a spy adventure if it doesn't end with a confrontation in the arch-villain's elaborate hideout. If it's a Western, the players may feel cheated without a shoot-out.

The climax can only be a confrontation; it must be against Señora Yma Árbol and her pirates. Stan initially considers placing the climax in the ruins of Atlantis, a surprising and visually impressive location. But genre considerations demand that a submarine movie end with a submarine battle: the climax will occur in the waters of the Caribbean. To introduce an extra level of suspense, Stan decides there will be a time-bomb aboard Fuller's sub, which the crew discovers only during the final battle. He also decides that a Russian sub, previously hostile to our heroes, will make a surprise appearance to help them out at a crucial moment.

Now you have a beginning (the hook) and an ending (the climax); it's time to go back and connect the dots with scenes of development and conflict.

Development

Scenes of development are those in which the plot is furthered via new revelations or plot twists which place additional obstacles in the hero's path, increasing our sense of suspense.

Stan decides that Fuller's first task should be to assemble a crew; this process allows for several scenes of development in which we meet the secondary characters as Fuller's player (Ensign Colville) rounds up his old crew from the war years.

Add spice to a few of these scenes by giving the protagonist minor obstacles to overcome.

Stan decides to complicate matters early on. In order to recruit his old pal Frenchy, Fuller must extricate him from a barroom brawl. This gives the players some action and helps establish Frenchy's character.

Other development scenes introduce or further subplots, most often personal stories between the main characters.

When the sub is as ready as it'll ever be, Fuller is surprised to find out that the Navy expert with the fancy sonar gear is Wendy Staton, a gorgeous, independent-minded woman. Romantic sparks fly, setting off a secondary storyline: will Fuller and Staton wind up in each others' arms?

Or they may allow the participants to relax and enjoy the atmosphere of the fictional or historical recreation. Not every moment in a story should be suspenseful; participants need emotional breathing space. If you're really clever, use these scenes to set up elements that turn out to be vital to the story, even though they seem unimportant when they play out.

Frenchy—a holographic supporting cast character played by the computer (and thus Stan)—gets drunk and gambles away the engine he was supposed to install in the submarine. Fuller has to win a poker game against a seductive gambler. This seems like nothing more than a fun distraction from the main story, with humorous by-play as Wendy tries to foil the gambler's attempts to distract Fuller with her feminine charms. But the gambler is in fact Señora Árbol. Thus, our main antagonist is introduced early in the storyline.

If a *Crewmember* (and thus a member of Stan's weekly group) portrays Frenchy, there is no way to ensure that he loses the sub's engine. Stan can always replace this scene during the session, or script an alternate. Similarly, he can simply have another character, under his control, lose the engine instead.

As in the above example, use development scenes to introduce all of the elements in your climax as early as you can, while disguising the extent to which they figure in that climax.

CONFLICT

Scenes of development lead to scenes of conflict, in which the protagonist faces obstacles that work to prevent him from reaching his goal. The most obvious conflict is a fight, but conflict scenes can also include arguments, battles against nature, or any other tests of the main characters' abilities.

Getting Frenchy to join the crew is a development. The fight in the bar is a conflict. The discovery that Fuller must play poker against Señora Árbol is a development. The actual poker game is a conflict.

Ideally, each conflict is more exciting, with higher stakes, than the one that precedes it. This gives your story a sense of forward momentum.

ACT PIVOTS

Once you've finished your list of developments and conflicts, it's time to arrange them into a structure. As you do this, choose two scenes to serve as your act pivots. These are the crucial scenes that separate your story into a standard three-act structure.

The first act comprises the scenes that introduce the characters, the plot, and any sub-plots.

*The first act of **Tigers of the Deep** assembles Fuller's crew, gets his submarine in working order, introduces Wendy Staton and ends with the launch of The Bengal.*

The first act pivot is a plot twist that surprises the protagonists by dramatically changing the conditions under which they'll pursue their goal. It spins the action from the early scenes to the story's central conflict. Ideally, this scene lets all involved know the meat of the story has begun. It is almost always a development rather than a conflict.

In the first act pivot, The Bengal narrowly evades an engagement with a superior Russian submarine, The Yakutsk. Now The Bengal is the hunted, as well as the hunter. This lets the players know the waters are dangerous, suggests an explanation for the disappearance of the ships, and foreshadows the final conflict.

The pivot that kicks off the third act changes the basic situation once again, this time pivoting the action towards the resolution; often the

change results from a confrontation which the protagonist loses; the negative consequences of his failure make the goal seem further away than it has ever been. The feeling of despondency and defeat makes the eventual victory seem all the sweeter.

The second act pivot occurs when Fuller and his crew find the ruins of Atlantis. Their exultation turns to dejection when they are captured by Señora Árbol and her pirates, who intend to torture them for top secret plans to Wendy's sonar device.

FLOW CHART

You're now ready to begin arranging these scenes on a flow chart; this maps out the structure of your story. Start with a skeleton that looks like this:



To finish fleshing out the adventure, sort your developments and conflicts so that a number of them fall between each stage. In addition to the shapes mentioned above, use circles and rectangles for developments. A well-structured story has more developments than conflicts in the beginning of the story and more conflicts than developments at the end. Each shape on your flow chart represents a chapter in your holoadventure.

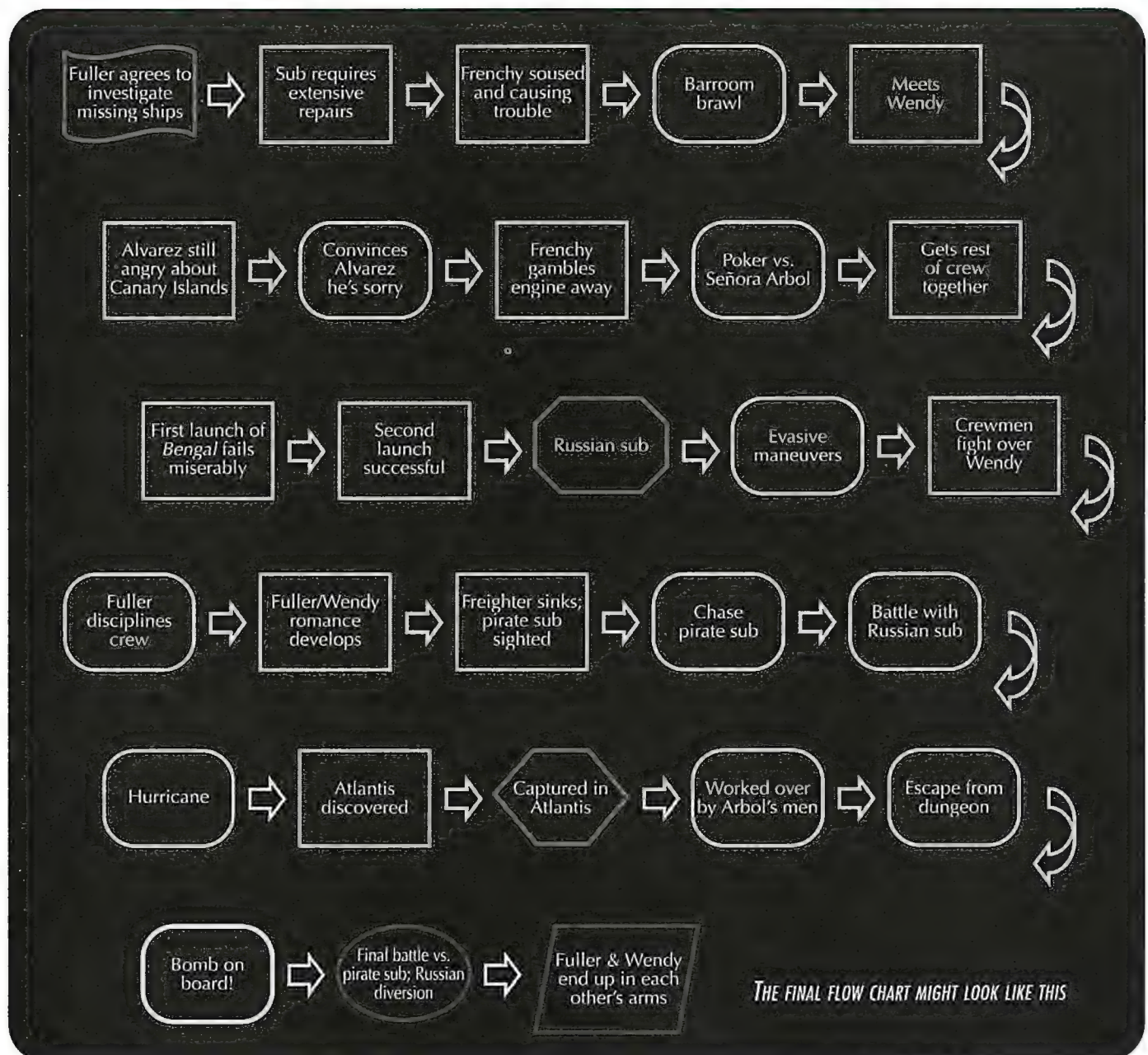
At this point, you might find empty spots in your chart. For example, you might find that there are only two scenes between your second and third acts. Although no hard and fast rule applies, you generally want about five scenes in the first and third acts and eight or so in the second. Create new developments and conflicts to fill in the gaps.

Or you may find that you have scenes next to one another that have no apparent way of connecting: in one scene, a character has been captured, and in the next he is free again, but there is no scene showing the escape. Fill that empty hole by adding the escape.

EXAMPLE

The initial skeleton of *Tigers of the Deep* starts out looking like this:





RESOLUTION

You'll notice that the above example ends with a flow chart entry we didn't mention. The scroll signifies the Resolution, a final scene (which can be very short) after the climax in which the heroes enjoy the fruits of their victory, the audience is assured that the threat is over, any surviving villains receive their comeuppance, loose ends are wrapped up and the fates of secondary characters are briefly established.

In a holonovel, the computer announces that the program has concluded; the programmer may call for appropriately triumphant music. The resolution may segue into a longer, non-narrative holodeck experience, such as a party, a sporting event or a romantic interlude.

WINGING IT

The flow chart is a guideline, not a straightjacket. The flow chart is linear; it provides only one direction through the plot, and doesn't account for disasters or unexpected player decisions.

In the *Star Trek* setting, the holodeck programmer starts with a flow chart. During play, the computer tries to keep the story on track, but uses a broader database of knowledge about both the genre and storytelling in general to improvise new chapters when events render those detailed on the flowchart impossible. Although its narrative algorithms choose the new events most likely to return the story to its planned climax, the computer can also improvise a new climax.

As Narrator, you'll have to take the role of the computer and "wing it" if the players take you off the flow chart. Don't panic. Concentrate more on having fun than on enforcing your preconceptions of the story, and everything will be fine. Better to have a slightly ragged story than to make the players feel that they have no real control over events.

PERSONAS

Once you've got your flow chart, the next step is to flesh out your characters. The flow chart already lists the major characters. You may wish to add a few background characters who have no role in the main story, just in case you're called upon to wing it, in which case they might come in handy.

CREATING A PERSONA

Personae are created according to a standard format. The persona description tells players what to do, how to act, and what to wear while playing the character. If the persona is controlled by the computer, the description is its basic guide to simulating its behavior.

THE FORMAT IS AS FOLLOWS:

Name: The persona's name.

Role: The persona's narrative role is given here. Protagonist, Sidekick, Romantic Interest, Antagonist and Supporting Player are the most common entries.

Type: If a widely-recognized stock persona, the standard term for that type is given here: Old Coot, Temptress, Professor's Daughter and so on. Otherwise, a one or two word summary of the character is provided.

Backstory: Provides any background information on the persona's past needed to play the character or understand the plot.

Attributes: Lists the persona's attributes and edges when "played" by the computer. If portrayed by a player character, then use their Attributes instead. (For example, Bob plays Lieutenant Moore, who plays Dixon Hill, and uses Lieutenant Moore's Attributes).

Standard Skills: Lists the standard skills the persona knows. Again, if this character is to be portrayed by a Crewmember, then use their skills. Alternately, these are the skills the character needs to fill his role.

Special Skills: Narrators are encouraged to come up with genre-appropriate skills not found in the *TNG* rules. A superhero might have Eyebeams or Turn Invisible as skills; a monster hunter might have a Faith skill to ward off vampires. Don't forget to list the attribute the skill is based on. Most *ST:TNG RPG* characters won't have these skills, but the computer can help simulate them (see "Autonomous Play," page 32).

Advantages/Disadvantages: Provided they are applicable.

Demeanor: One or two characteristic mannerisms of speech and gesture, or just a general attitude, are provided here. This is how the computer will portray the character; the Crewmember playing the persona can attempt to portray this, or substitute her own demeanor.

Goals: Tells the player what the persona is trying to achieve. This usually consists of two entries; one is his goal for the adventure, the other his general goal in life.

Costume: This is a detailed set of specifications for the replicator, to create the necessary costumes. For our purposes, this is a brief description of the character's clothing, plus any personal props, special make-up or other accoutrements.

EXAMPLE

Name: Dick Fuller.

Role: Protagonist.

Type: Hard-bitten adventurer.

Backstory: A crack submarine commander during World War II, Dick has never fully adjusted to civilian life. He runs a bar in a picturesque Caribbean port town, but it isn't enough for him.

Attributes: Fitness: 3, Coordination 2 (Reaction +1), Intellect 2, Presence 2 (Willpower +1), Psi 0

Standard Skills: Command (Naval Training) 3 (4), Espionage (Covert Communications) 2 (3), Gaming (Poker) 2 (3), Projectile Weapon (9MM pistol) 2 (3), Unarmed Combat (Bar Brawl) 3 (4).

Special Skills: Fitness—Hold His Liquor 2; Intellect—Naval Tactics (Submarine) 3 (4).

Advantages/Disadvantages: Alertness (+2), Toughness (+2), Impulsive (-1)

Demeanor: Macho, cynical, gruff. Chews his lower lip when nervous.

Goal: Find out why ships are disappearing; alleviate your restlessness with manly adventure.

Costume: Well-worn blue cotton shirt with sleeves rolled up; jeans, sailor's cap. Must be period for 1950s expatriate American.

CREATING ADDITIONAL PERSONAE

If there are more would-be participants than the holoprogrammer allowed for, some Crewmembers will have to invent their own new personae, which the computer (as played by the Narrator) will have to work into the story. To create new personae, players should fill in a copy of the persona template sheet on p. 101. Ignore attributes and skills; the Crewmember uses his own.

Crewmembers need access to the PADD briefing to create personae with a reason to involve themselves in the story. The Narrators tell them what's in the PADD briefing, so they can create characters appropriate to the setting. Checking out the backstories of existing personae should provide necessary inspiration for new ones. Players should decide what their personae will gain if the protagonist of the story gets what he wants. This dovetailing of goals between protagonists and new personae makes life easier for the Narrator, who must fit the new personae into a pre-existing plot that makes no allowances for them. A personal relationship to the main character always makes a strong starting point. Jot this relationship down under "backstory." Under "goals," explain why your persona wants the protagonist to get what he wants, and what else would happen for your persona when he does.

(Players can also create personae with reasons to help supporting characters or antagonists to succeed in their goals, but this is trickier for the Narrator to execute. Players should seek permission from their Narrators before embarking on his variation.)

Players should fill in the "demeanor" entry only if they want to use a different set of quirks or mannerisms to indicate that their PCs are playing fictional characters. Otherwise, they should leave it blank, and play their characters as normal.

Try to match your character to a recognizable type from fiction of this genre. Sum up the character's type in a pithy couple of words and write them down in the "type" entry. If you can't think of a type, settle for the all-purpose phrase supporting character. Think up a "name" that conjures up the genre and your character type. Finally, add a note on "costume" to create a visual image of your Crewmember in his role as the persona.

Use the persona templates presented in this book as a model when creating new personae. Keep the entries short and sweet. Playing a Crewmember playing a holonovel character is confusing enough without getting too fancy about it.

Rose wants her character, Lieutenant Landers, to participate in Tigers of the Deep. With the main female persona already spoken for by another participant, Rose must invent a new one. The Narrator asks her to create someone who wants the protagonist, Dick Fuller, to succeed in his goal, without stepping on the role of the existing female lead. Rose figures a family member fits the bill, and creates Carmen Fuller, Dick's tomboyish, exuberant younger sister. She fills out the template as follows:

Name: Carmen Fuller

Role: Sidekick

Type: Wisecracking tomboy

Backstory: Raised as a naval brat, Carmen suffers from the family condition: wanderlust and a hunger for adventure. She ditched her fancy school back Stateside to come hang out in the

Caribbean with her big brother and exercise her secret fondness for heavy-duty mechanical repair.

Attributes: - (Rose will use Lieutenant Landers' Attributes).

Standard Skills: - (Rose will use Lieutenant Landers' Skills, too).

Special Skills:-

Advantages/Disadvantages: - (Whatever traits Lieutenant Landers possesses).

Demeanor: Talks out of the side of her mouth. Her efforts to disguise her femininity merely highlight it.

Goals: Help Dick snap out of his funk. Find a really big machine to help repair.

Costume: Cut-off jeans, naval surplus shirt, knotted around the navel, red bandana on her head.

MODIFYING EXISTING PERSONAE

By virtue of the holodeck's function, Crewmembers can change any aspect of the existing personae programmed into the story. They can always ignore the demeanor, can vary the costume and even alter the character's name, backstory and goals.

As a player, though, you should take care not to use this ability to overwhelm your Narrator. Just because your character can do something with the holodeck doesn't mean you ought to have him do it. Think carefully before changing major elements of a persona.

If your Narrator isn't comfortable improvising his way around sudden changes affecting the story, gratuitous fiddling will put more pressure on her, and ultimately result in a frustrating gaming experience for everyone. Consult your Narrator to see if any non-cosmetic changes will make his job too challenging.

Chuck's character, Ensign Gro'ozal, will be taking on the persona of Dirk Fuller. Chuck asks the Narrator if it's okay for Gro'ozal to wear a white dress shirt, sport a silk black eye patch, and carry a Colt .45. Stan, the Narrator, okays these choices; they won't change the adventure much. Getting a little carried away, Chuck asks if Gro'ozal can change Fuller into a voodoo priest capable of summoning spirits and breathing underwater.

Stan rolls his eyes; Star Trek: The Next Generation is his first roleplaying game, and he's only been running it for a few months. He doesn't feel confident that he can improvise his way around such a big change. "Uh, Chuck, maybe after I've run a couple of sessions with holodeck scenes, I'll be able to adapt to that, but right now I'm still getting the hang of this, okay?"

Chuck nods; while Gro'ozal could definitely do this as a Starfleet officer in the fictional world of Star Trek, it would place too great a burden on the Narrator. Gro'ozal decides to play it straight.

SUBSTITUTIONS

Sometimes a participant may not be available to play his part in a chapter of an ongoing holonovel. In this case, the computer can take over and run his character for him. It substitutes a holographic image of the persona (thoughtfully provided by the story's programmer) and simulates the persona's actions based on its programming. In a holodeck adventure, the Narrator plays the role of the computer, and runs the character as though they were any other Supporting Cast character. Be sure to include attributes and traits for the character.

In the last session, Ensign Hasui appeared in the holodeck as Frenchy, Dirk Fuller's sidekick. But Jean, who plays Ensign Hasui, is unable to make tonight's game session. Stan explains away Hasui's absence by saying he's got the Bolian flu and is confined to sick bay. When it comes time to play the holodeck scenes, the computer creates an image of Frenchy, and the story continues.

Likewise, a Crewmember can step into the role of a persona at any time, even if that persona was computer-run in previous episodes. Although the computer could change the Crewmember's appearance to match the previous image of the holographic character, participants hardly ever instruct it to do so.

TAKING ON A PERSONA

When Crewmembers take on personae, they read the character briefing and do their best to act out the roles provided to them. Holographic characters react poorly to Crewmembers who drop out of character or fail to roleplay their personae as written up in the description. At first they'll say things like, "You're not actin' like yourself today, Dick." If the player persists in acting out of character, the story flow chart is likely to be disrupted as the computer tries to improvise around the Crewmember's failure to cooperate with the holonovel's basic assumptions. The result is rarely entertaining.

ATTRIBUTES AND SKILLS

Holonovel participants have three options: they can rely on their own abilities, use mock abilities simulated by the program or a combination of the two.

AUTONOMOUS PLAY

Even highly experienced characters lack many exotic, anachronistic skills their personae would logically display. Starfleet Academy doesn't teach courses in antique firearms or vehicles. When a character tries to do something he lacks a skill in, the Narrator should first look for an analogous present-day skill. Vehicle Operation (Shuttlecraft) might be used as a substitute for Vehicle Operation (Biplane), with an appropriate, but slight, penalty. Narrators should be generous in declaring skills analogous,

otherwise your characters will constantly be humiliating themselves by failing at simple tasks in the holodeck.

Where no remotely analogous skill can be found, use Attribute rolls. Driving a car might be a Coordination Test, for example. Difficulties for exotic skill use in holonovels should be lower than might be realistic in a real-life situation; after all, holoprogrammers want their audiences to be entertained, and nothing is less entertaining than continual failure.

Still, dedicated holonovel participants may want to actually learn the exotic skills required to successfully complete their adventures. Much of the fun of the holodeck lies in honing abilities and learning new things. Players may therefore spend experience points on exotic skills for holodeck adventures, at the Narrator's discretion.

Narrators should give players a break when they choose skills of little possible use outside the holodeck, charging only half the usual number of experience points for any skill increase after the first. Every so often, however, Crew members may figure out how to put these skills to good use in the outside world—as Captain Picard did in *Star Trek: First Contact*, when he dispatched a group of Borg drones using a holographic tommy gun he'd obviously learned to use in the course of his many adventures as Dixon Hill. Narrators should encourage creative thinking like this, but if a character wrings serious advantages from an exotic holodeck skill on a regular basis, it's time to rethink the special experience point discount and start charging the full amount.

AIDED PLAY

The Crewmembers featured in your game, like those on the TV show, belong to an elite of the most talented, resourceful and highly-trained individuals in the Federation. Holonovels set at difficulty levels meant to challenge individuals of this caliber would frustrate and annoy most ordinary people. The regular folks who make up the vast majority of Federation residents employ an option called aided play when enjoying holonovels.

The computer adjusts its difficulty level so that the participant seems to be as competent as his persona, at least when he interacts with elements of the holographic environment. Thus, a participant playing a muscleman can dead-lift that set of two hundred kilogram weights, even if he's suffering from muscle atrophy in real life, thanks to a computer which alters the mass simulation of the holographic barbells. Computer-run personae react to an insecure person as if he is as wildly persuasive as the persona. If you're an ordinary person with no experience firing a phaser, the computer can compensate for you when you shoot at a holographic character or object. Even if you close your eyes and fire blindly, the holographic environment compensates to make it seem as if you've shot down that oncoming Klingon warrior. Experienced fighters find the illusion completely

unconvincing, but the aided play system is not designed for them; they can use autonomous play instead.

Participants discover the downside of aided play when they try to use their real-life talents in areas where they are superior to their personae. The computer immerses the participant in the persona by making those things harder for him. A naturally charismatic sort playing an unprepossessing lackey finds that the holographic characters snub him. If a weightlifter plays a scrawny kid and tries to move a boulder, the computer increases the simulated mass of the boulder so that the participant finds it just as hard to move as the persona would.

Aided play can do nothing to change your abilities when you're using them on another participant in the environment. The charming officer seems no less appealing to her fellow crewmen when she adopts a withdrawn persona. The computer can't improve a participant's aim when he's firing a weapon at a real person.

MIXED PLAY

The holodeck's computer can fine-tune so that only certain abilities are aided or suppressed by the computer. A holonovel participant in the aforementioned musclemen role may wish to use all of his normal abilities, but need a little boost in the strength department. He therefore instructs the computer to treat him as if he can bench press two hundred and fifty kilos.

Holoprogrammers sometimes build handicaps into their programs. A story that requires a physically weak protagonist may include programming instructions directing the computer to gauge the participant's actual strength and then make its objects heavier and holographic characters stronger in accordance with those readings. Thus, the program creates an illusion of weakness geared to the actual strength of each individual participant.

VICTORY

Interactive holonovels are part entertainment, part game. If a player achieves the narrative goal for his character, he "wins" the game. It is possible for more than one player to win if the goals of their personae are compatible.

The computer can alter programs to place participants in all the major roles, including those of the antagonists. If a Crewmember takes the role of the villain, he has his own goals to fulfill, as supplied in his PADD briefing. Antagonist goals usually paraphrase the following sentence: "You win if the protagonist goes down to bitter defeat before, or during the climax."

In *Tigers of the Deep*, villainess Señora Yma Árbol wins if Dirk Fuller's submarine sinks, taking him with it. She wins a partial victory if Dirk is otherwise defeated, and her piracy operation left unscathed.

Although it's hard to imagine the heroic crewmen of the *Enterprise* deriving much enjoyment from a game in which they play the forces of evil and triumph, some groups may nonetheless enjoy seeing their Crewmembers test out this feature. This is best tried with holonovels featuring light moods and implausible, cartoonish villains. Otherwise you risk diverging too far from the idealistic spirit of *Star Trek*; although it may be fun at the time, it could spoil the illusion of being a participant in the *Star Trek* universe.

COMPETITIVE PLAY

If Crewmembers are playing against each other, the Narrator has little control over the story's progression. Participants simply take the goals given in their PADD briefings and attempt to realize them before the members of the other team accomplish theirs. The Narrator acts as an impartial referee, deciding the difficulties of actions within the particular genre environment and making sure the die roles are fair, and narrating the action. To keep actions of one team separate from another, the Narrator may require players to submit their plans of action as written notes, or may separate the teams into different areas, shuttling back and forth between rooms to get instructions. They only bring opposing players together when their personae appear face to face in the same holodeck scene.

During competitive play, the computer accepts only a limited subset of commands from players, so that they can't cheat by changing the environment instead of dealing with the inherent dilemmas posed by the scenario. It's fun the first time when you win a rowing competition by turning the other team's boat into a giant bowl of *plomeek* soup, but the trick gets tired awfully quickly. The Narrator should allow players to freeze the program—this is necessary if someone is called to duty—but prohibit them from otherwise altering the environment, genre or holographic characters. That would be considered cheating.

In competitive play, the holodeck creates two separate environments, so that each team can operate in its own holographic sets independently of the other team. These soft wall partitions prevent the two groups from hearing or seeing each other. When personae from two teams meet, the holodeck program simply integrates the environment. Sometimes, this occurs over the course of several scenes, as both teams move unavoidably towards the same location, or suddenly, as when one group surprises the other.

For example, the group playing members of Nicki the Nose's gang sits at the Cabana Room, plotting to rough up a guy with a bad debt; meanwhile, a few feet away, and in their own simulation, the group playing Dixon Hill's team tracks down clues. When Nicki's gang shows up to lean on the deadbeat, and Dix's team arrives to question him, the computer simulates the trip for both teams, seamlessly integrating the two groups at the deadbeat's house.

For more information on the holodeck's technical aspects with regard to competitive play, see "The Holodeck," page 7.

NARRATOR ADVICE

Because of the truly interactive nature of the holodeck, Crewmembers can instruct the computer to adapt a standard holonovel to competitive play, with all the major roles taken by player characters. Ensign Colville might take the role of Prince Eldred, for instance, while Lieutenant Alessara might play the Skull King in this immensely popular fantasy series. In addition, many programs are written specifically to be satisfying in a competitive context.

Competitive programs feature unstructured narratives. With two teams acting in the same environment simultaneously, the chances of successfully executing a carefully structured three-act set-up with specific act pivots and climax are practically nonexistent. Instead, the Narrator creates the environment descriptively, and takes on the roles of all the Supporting Cast characters not played by Crewmembers, but leaves the action largely up to the players. In this case, the Narrator has little control over what, for example, the first act pivot will be, or when it occurs, but should narrate the events in the scene.

The Narrator should still determine the genre, premise and goal, with input from the players. Together you can create a truly interactive roleplaying experience. Typically, someone will approach the group with an idea for a competitive story, a Dixon Hill adventure, for example. If everyone is amenable, this establishes the genre and the main characters. If the adventure is one from a published source (like this book), that makes it even easier—the genre, premise and main characters are already established; all that's left to decide is who plays which persona.

Next, determine the story's central conflict. Every story portrays some central conflict—somebody wants something, someone wants to stop a particular event or someone wants something to happen. This is typically one of the character's goals (see "Personas"). While this can be as simple as "defeat the other team," this rarely makes for interesting storytelling (and that, after all, is the point of the holodeck). By establishing a dramatic objective, you create a story. Let the players help develop this goal—"Dixon Hill has to solve the mayor's murder, Captain Proton must stop the Chaotica's invasion, the Gunslinger wants to save the town from underhanded robber barons." Note how this defines not only the protagonist's goals, but also the antagonist's.

The best stories establish a neutral goal that both antagonist and protagonist can pursue parallel to each other, rather than setting both in direct competition. While Dixon Hill may want to break up Nicki the Nose's gambling rackets, it's better to establish a goal for both personas to strive for. The Narrator could establish a backstory that leads to the current adven-

ture. For example, what if someone murders the mayor, and Dix wants to bring the perpetrator to justice while Nicki the Nose wants to protect him. Who killed the mayor? Why did he do it? How is Nicki the Nose involved? These are the questions Dixon Hill has to answer. Nicki the Nose's player has to prevent him from finding those answers (perhaps his goal is "get the murderer out of town before Dix can find him").

The Narrator should be careful to limit the amount of input the players have in establishing the goal and backstory. Otherwise, they begin the story knowing too much. While a Dixon Hill story's goal may be to solve the mayor's murder, they shouldn't determine the murderer's identity, for example, otherwise there's nothing to investigate.

Just because the players compete against each other on the holodeck, and thus guide the story's progression through their actions, does not mean the Narrator has no input whatsoever. There are dozens of ancillary characters being run by the computer (and the Narrator)—the newspaper boy, the maid and the cowpokes in the saloon; the computer controls these characters and simulates their behavior, not the players. The Narrator can thus influence the way the story unfolds through these minor Supporting Cast characters.

In any good story, even these characters have their own motivations, their own stories to tell. During the course of an investigation, Dixon Hill must question a variety of witnesses; the bartender at Micky's Bar and Grill could give Dix misleading information. If Dix questions the shoe shine boy about the mayor's murder, nothing stops him from running to tell Nicki the Nose about it. Meanwhile, when Nicki the Nose tries to cover his tracks, he must rely on low-level street thugs to do his bidding; who's to say how they go about their business? And what about the San Francisco police? They could certainly give both player character teams a hard time—making three groups in the story: The two played by the player characters and one played by the Narrator.

In these little ways, the Narrator can massage the story in the direction she wants it to go, and put both teams on an equal footing. The Narrator can explain this little bit of meddling as the computer's narrative algorithms working to create an interesting story using elements from its genre databanks.

The Narrator, as the computer, also controls the fictional environment—after all, the computer creates the simulation from its historical records. She determines the scenery and weather, as well as any occurrences that arise as a result of play (barring input from the players; see "Quirks of Holodeck Play," below). For example, if Nicki's lieutenant searches the Mayor's house, he'll likely leave fingerprints behind for Dix to discover. You should be careful when establishing the consequences of a player character's actions, however. It's too easy to fudge in favor of one group or another. Saying the thug dropped a matchbook from Nicki's club while searching the mayor's house could be construed as being unfair. (If, on the



other hand, Dixon Hill catches the thug and searches him, it might be logical to assume he has the matchbook on him). If both player character groups sit in separate rooms, the Narrator will have to describe the setting and action, keeping in mind the other group's activities. Nicki the Nose's lieutenant might toss the mayor's house, and the Narrator should describe the desk drawers pulled out, the papers strewn about the floor, and the slashed sofa cushions when Dix and company arrive on the scene.

As always, the Narrator has the final word on what transpires during the game, especially with regard to computer-controlled characters. Players should refrain from constantly second-guessing the Narrator. In the above example, if the thug searching the mayor's house is a holographic character, and the Narrator establishes that he drops a matchbook during the scene, players should avoid "no he didn't, yes he did" arguments. If the Narrator cannot dictate the player character's actions, then the players cannot micromanage the characters under the Narrator's control. On the other hand, the assumption is that the Narrator will remain impartial; don't have characters do something blatantly silly. Finally, the Narrator should refrain from making large-scale changes to the story, such as devastating San Francisco with an earthquake.

Remember that while the players compete against each other, the "real" people involved are the player characters, and they're Starfleet officers. While Bob may be upset Jane got the best of him in a holodeck adventure, Bob's character Ensign Colville and Jane's character Lieutenant Alessara shouldn't allow these to interfere in their duties.

PLAYING VILLAINS

In the typical *ST: TNG RPG* series, the Crewmembers are the good guys. They don't beam down to every planet toting the latest in phaser technology, shooting first and asking questions later. That's not playing the "Starfleet way." On the holodeck, however, Starfleet officers can let down their hair and pursue almost any fantasy they desire. They can, if they want, play megalomaniacal geniuses bent on taking over the world, 1920s gangsters smuggling bootleg whiskey into ancient Chicago or pirates cruising the Caribbean in search of plunder. Often, this can have beneficial effects. But Starfleet officers should be careful to confine their more unscrupulous tendencies to the holodeck. Just because you play The Battle of Tong Vey—in which you take the role of Emperor Sompek, and are encouraged to raze the city—does not mean you can lay waste to the surface of a planet because you want to.

For those Starfleet officers uncomfortable assuming the role of the antagonist, but still desiring the thrill of competitive play, a number of programs exist that present each group as morally equivalent. Sometimes both teams are equally underhanded, as in the Wall Street soap opera *Serious Business*, or the comedic

caper *Big Heist* on Uffizi Street, in which each team plays a gang of bumbling thieves faced with a never-ending onslaught of slapstick obstacles as they try to break into an art gallery.

Sometimes both teams race to be the first to complete the same, worthy goal, as in the historical-medical drama *Serum Hunt*, in which the teams are headed by rival doctors fighting a plague ravaging a Tellarite colony.

Still other programs cast the two sides in a morally ambiguous situation in which either outcome can be seen as worthy. In the political simulation *Ont-O Conference*, each team plays a faction in a Planetary Senate debating a major terraforming project. One side argues that the project will feed a starving populace; the other, that it will wreak havoc on traditional social values, because the planet's religion revolves around respect for the land and submission to nature. Both sets of personae believe passionately that their desired course of action is the right thing to do. Victory for either side reminds the players of the complexity of real-life, instead of the simple verities of escapist narrative; both endings provide a mix of positive and negative outcomes.

Remember, most villains don't think of themselves as "villains." They have their own perspective, in which their actions are justified. Just because someone is the antagonist does not mean they must be "evil." Indeed, the most interesting antagonists are those with a perfectly good motivation for their actions. Perhaps Nicki the Nose uses the proceeds from his gambling rackets to support the city's orphans, prevents more dangerous mobsters from muscling in or has some redeeming quality about him.

QUIRKS OF HOLODECK PLAY

Keep in mind that players can alter programs at any time with a mere voice command. They can arm themselves with phasers in a caveman scenario, change the floor plan of a room or conjure up rescue parties as needed. A participant faced with a threat can stop the program in order to think about it as long as he likes. As a holographic character charges him he can freeze the program, take two steps to the left, and then restart the program, so that his enemy crashes into the spot he just abandoned. He can turn five charging enemies into two, or a big, strong opponent into a weak, clumsy one.

Participants can skip over scenes, or simply tell the computer to treat as a given that they've succeeded at certain tasks. ("Computer, continue as if I'd defused the bomb.") They can tell the computer to make a task easier, thus changing the difficulty level. This is like cheating at solitaire, though, and few holonovel enthusiasts do it. Although we never see characters on the TV shows cheating during a holonovel, Narrators enjoy no assurance that their players will show the same scruples about the integrity of their stories.

One standard practice is to stop a program when things go dreadfully wrong, and then restart it from a specified previous point. This is not considered cheating. Holonovel programmers expect players to do this, and program accordingly. Creators of horror programs—such as *The Doom That Came to Korath*—expect their participants to “die” multiple times before they finally figure how to complete the story successfully and survive.

In a normal roleplaying situation, the Narrator has the advantage of being able to place limits on Crewmembers’ actions; those limits allow him to reliably anticipate what will happen so that he can shape his story accordingly. On the holodeck, the situation is reversed; the only limits lie in the imagination and self-restraint of players. Because of this fact, the holodeck may provide Narrators with their most difficult challenges in running a *Star Trek* series. Reacting smoothly to players whose characters alter the environment while still keeping the story entertaining can tax all but the most naturally talented improvisers. Here are some techniques you can use to even the odds.

MINIMIZING IMPROVISATION

Limit the role of the holodeck in your game. *Star Trek* episodes centered around the completion of holodeck scenarios always put limits on the characters; we never see them altering the fictional environment the way they could. Perhaps they do so in the downtime between episodes, but the writers never make a point of showing them doing it onscreen. If you’re worried about your ability to improvise, make the holodeck a background element in your game. The players can play the scenarios in this book a bit at a time, in between confrontations with the usual range of threats and obstacles in the game universe. Holonovel sequences become characterization scenes only; no great suspense revolves around the successful completion of a holonovel.

Ask for your players’ forbearance. If you’re uncomfortable improvising, but your players still want to run holodeck adventures and care about their outcomes, ask them to have their characters choose to avoid the more outrageous cheats possible on the holodeck. Some players may not want to fiddle with the story’s parameters. After all, their characters enter the holodeck to enjoy a particular genre. There’s no point to playing a Dixon Hill story if you’re going to exceed the bounds of genre. So while it may be fun to play a Dixon Hill adventure toting around phasers and making the difficulty ridiculously easy, you’re no longer playing a story in the film noir tradition. If straightforward play is good enough for Captain Picard, it’s good enough for them.

IMPROVISATION TIPS

If you are willing to experiment with the extreme elasticity of the holodeck environment, there are a few techniques you can use to make improvising easier.

When thrown for a loop, don’t feel the need to immediately blurt out the first idea that pops into your head. Give yourself time to think. You can do so by calling a time out, either within or outside of the story.

Assuming that you’ve split up the action and there are other Crewmembers to focus on, you might cut back to a scene involving Crewmembers uninvolved in the holodeck story. Or you might declare that something happens beyond the holodeck’s four walls to interrupt play. Maybe some threat chooses this moment to reveal itself, so that a call to battle stations rings out. Perhaps a problem comes up in one of the participants’ departments, so that the program must be frozen while they attend to it. Be careful though, that in improvising your way out of a holodeck problem, you don’t improvise your way into a narrative corner in the “real” world of the Crewmembers.

Alternately you, as Narrator, can just tell your players that you need time to think. Sometimes you can be sneaky about this, announcing that it’s time to call for pizza, or that you need a glass of water for your parched throat. Take this break time to let ideas come to you; you’ll be surprised how much a moment’s pause can take the pressure off you and allow inspiration to flow.

Use the old boomerang trick. Make the consequences of cheating worse than the benefits. If they



reduce the numbers of thugs coming at them, make the remaining thugs extra tricky. The players aren't the only ones who can change the genre. If the Crew members arm themselves with phasers in a caveman scenario, have ancient astronauts show up and kidnap them; done well, the players should never suspect this wasn't part of the original story.

Think in genre. Study the new situations with which the Crewmembers present you in terms of the logic of the holonovel's genre. Ask yourself what would happen next in a spy movie, western, musical or whatever.

When all else fails, bail. The computer's ability to improvise a sensible story within genre constraints while the players tinker with the parameters is not infinite. When its capacity is stretched to the limit, the program ends and the computer voice says, "Program aborted. Narrative algorithms exceeded." This gives you an out when mischievous players tax your ingenuity too greatly. It also sends the message that cheating is no fun. But use this option sparingly, only as a last resort; otherwise, your players will know they've gotten to you, and will always do it.

PLAYER-CREATED PROGRAMS

Holonovel creation needn't be the sole preserve of Narrators. Encourage your players to create their own. They can either give you the flow charts, personae lists and notes they've created, so that you can run the holonovel for them and for the other players, or they can give you a break and take over as Narrator for the holodeck portion of the game. If you want anything to happen in the "real world" beyond the holodeck, you should step back in as Narrator to adjudicate those events. Otherwise you can sit back and enjoy a chance to play for a change, running one a persona, as played by one of your favorite shipboard NPCs.

In some respects, this can be a good way to break in a new Narrator. Because the stakes are so low, the adventure has few lasting consequences. A new Narrator can cut her teeth without worrying about narrating herself into a corner. You can go back and replay scenes that don't go particularly well. In this case, the players should hold off on altering the story, as described under "Quirks of Holodeck Play." A person new to narrating might not be able to handle the heavy demands of improvisation.

OTHER TYPES OF PROGRAMS

Although this chapter concentrates on holonovels, they are not the only, or even the most common, type of holodeck program.

PERSONAL PROGRAMS

Most holodeck programs simulate personal training, recreation, and leisure, with no interactive element. You can participate in your favorite sport, attend a cultural event or brush up on your combat

skills. Worf's combat training program, designed to test his fighting skills against a variety of opponents on a barren planetary surface, is a prime example of this type of program.

Worf is not adopting a persona, or taking part in a narrative. Many crewmen have similar programs geared to their own individual tastes. Encourage your players to invent their own personal programs to highlight their characterization, as described earlier in this chapter.

SCRIPTED NARRATIVES

Some holodeck programs are completely scripted. For example, Data explored human emotion by acting in a holographic version of Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Scripted programs are essentially theatrical performances with sets, lighting and some performances controlled by the computer. Although holographic actors try to cover for flesh-and-blood actors who muff their lines or ad-lib, scripted programs don't allow for the kind of improvisation found in interactive holonovels.

HOLO-ETHICS

The common consensus within the Federation is that adult individuals have a right to engage in any behavior on a holodeck, so long as it harms no one. Federation law gives strong privacy protection to holodeck users.

It is a serious offense to access another individual's holodeck programming without permission, or make a record of an individual's private holodeck use. Breaking in on a holodeck session in progress is a severe breach of etiquette.

However, it is also forbidden to use the holodeck to violate the privacy of others. Using a real person's image and personality profile to create a holographic representation is considered unethical, and in bad taste. Programs that offer interaction with the holographic images of real people without their permission are considered highly unethical.

DIXON HILL

AND

THE CASE

OF THE

GOLDEN

SERPENT

PROGRAM LOADED. ENTER WHEN READY.

The sun rose over the City by the Bay, cold and gray like a preacher's tombstone. Some people say San Francisco's beautiful, others who know better call her cruel. The streets can be hard on mornings like this, breaking hearts and souls with the smile of an angel. Ordinary joes do their best to get by, but somewhere out there, someone's dying for the price of a song. Tawdry little men chase their tawdry little dreams, hoping for an escape from the city's gray smile. I didn't know it when I crawled out of bed that morning, but one of those dreams was about to kick me in the teeth.

My name's Dixon Hill. The sign on my door reads "Investigations."

BACKGROUND

Dixon Hill and the Case of the Golden Serpent involves Jean-Luc Picard's favorite hard-boiled P.I. in a film noir detective story. In the spirit of Raymond Chandler and dark, seamy movies like *The Maltese Falcon*, it features a tough anti hero, beautiful femme fatales and a mystery only Dixon Hill can solve. A valuable artifact disappears, and the city's underworld tears the streets apart looking for it. Can Dix find it and bring a murderer to justice before it vanishes forever?

Crewmembers assume the roles of Dixon Hill and his friends, thrust into the midst of this mystery by forces beyond their control. Like all detective stories, *The Golden Serpent* contains many complicated plot threads. Narrators should study this adventure thoroughly and familiarize themselves with the motivations of its central figures before running it. Some of the sidebars also discuss moods and themes of film noir detective stories. These can help the Narrator establish a proper atmosphere.

THE MAIN CHARACTERS

CREWMEMBER PERSONAE

The first group of characters represents the potential "heroes" of the story, personae the Crewmembers should portray. Use the Crew's stats for resolving Skill Tests, but make sure each Crewmember is familiar with their new persona. Someone needs to play Dixon Hill; use or discard the rest depending on the number of Crewmembers participating. Narrators might wish to run some of these characters as Supporting Cast to help the Crew. Feel free to create additional personalities if you wish.

At least one Crewmember playing this scenario should have Search 4 or better.

DIXON HILL

Dixon Hill makes his living as a private investigator in the mold of Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe. He works out of a shabby office in San Francisco, the city

GENRE TEMPLATE: FILM NOIR DETECTIVE STORY

Examples: Movies: *The Maltese Falcon*, *L.A. Confidential*.
Novels: *The Maltese Falcon*, by Dashiell Hammett.

Imagery: Dark, rainy city streets, shadowy alleys and grungy apartments. Docks dimly lit, covered in fog and teeming with rough roustabouts. The detective's dingy office with his loyal secretary holding off angry clients and creditors. The local police precinct bustling with cops wondering whether to help a private investigator or arrest him as a suspect. Opulent night clubs run by the mob. A client's posh estate filled with clues revealing a hidden agenda.

Themes: Solving murders and mysteries amidst the corrupt and backstabbing society of America in the 1940s. Righting wrongs and bringing criminals to justice, even if it means bending some of the rules and joining forces with potential enemies.

Stock Characters:

The Detective: Stoic, determined, and often in it for the money. The detective or private eye often becomes embroiled in some greater plot, the tool of others manipulating events behind the scenes. He must unravel the mystery without falling victim himself.

Quote: "I'll take the job, sweetheart, but if I find out you're lying to me about all this, I'm out."

The Sidekick: The detective might enlist the aid of several sidekicks, from old flames and friendly bartenders to former colleagues with the police. The sidekick works as a foil to the investigator, compensating for his weaknesses, providing a contrast to him, and helping him avoid dangerous entanglements.

Quote: "Have you seen today's paper? It contains some interesting news about our latest client which she apparently forgot to tell us."

The Femme Fatale: A gorgeous woman, often the client, lures the main characters into the plot. At first she seems the helpless victim seeking retribution for crimes against her, but she inevitably hides more sinister intentions. These conflict within the detective, the object of her innocent charms and deep beauty.

Quote: "Oh, it's been such a nightmare for me. Won't you please help?"

The Mob: Members of organized crime are obvious antagonists in film noir. They pursue their agendas with well-dressed thugs armed with submachine guns, applying just enough brute force to get their way. They make their enemies disappear quickly and violently.

Quote: "It seems you've crossed me for the last time. You get me that statue or you'll be feeding the fishes in the bay."

The Friendly Gangster: Sharp detectives use the mob for their own purposes, too. Rivalry between gangsters often means one might help an investigator if it hurts the opposition; however, the action must ultimately serve the mobster's own interests, too.

Quote: "Let me get this straight. My men keep Fatmann's goons busy while you find the statue, and when this is all done I get half the take? Sounds mutually profitable."

Plot Devices: Missing treasure, a wronged spouse, a murder or robber, all of which might show the tip of a greater conspiracy.

where he's lived his entire life. The son of a long-shoreman, Dixon joined the police force after high school, but left after a few years to start his own business. He's had a long and storied career as a private investigator, solving countless murders and putting all manner of criminals behind bars. Despite that, he always finds himself a little short of rent money every month.

Tough, smart, and well-known among the San Francisco underworld, Hill has a reputation as a man of his word, and adheres to a rough form of morality—his armor and shield among the dark streets. While not above "roughing up" a well-known criminal, he never strikes a woman, and tries his best to protect those he believes are innocent. Once hired for a job, he sees it through to the end, no matter the cost. He takes no guff from anyone, and only warily extends his trust. Those who earn it however, find they have a friend for life.

DIXON HILL

Role: Protagonist

Type: Hard-boiled P.I.

Backstory: The best private dick in San Francisco, Dix is well known among thugs and law enforcement officials alike. He does his job with dogged determination and can't resist a mystery. Trying to deter him from a puzzle or crime only convinces him to keep at it.

Demeanor: Tough, cynical, gruff, but with a streak of morality.

Goal: To do his job, and make sure the guilty are brought to justice. Ideally, to make a little money while he's doing it.

Costume: Well-worn suit, trenchcoat, gray fedora. A pistol hidden in an inside pocket.

Quote: "Play straight with me, baby, or it's the big house for sure."

CARLOS

The *Enterprise's* Lt. Commander Data created Carlos on the fly in the original inception of the Dixon Hill program; friends excused his pale skin by claiming Carlos was from South America. He has since been incorporated into the regular program. A native of Bogota, Carlos became a "citizen of the world," adventuring from one corner of the globe to the other. Along the way he amassed quite a criminal record: everything from smuggling to gun-running. Authorities in several countries want him for various crimes, and Carlos always seems on the run from somebody. Despite that, he's become a good friend to Dixon Hill, and helped him out on numerous occasions; whatever he's done in the past, Dix seems willing to forgive him.

Carlos is a big man, with strong hands and a prominent face. He wears smart pin-striped suits and always looks sharp. He disdains the use of weapons, preferring his bare hands in combat. He secretly has

no wish to kill anyone, a moral line he refuses to cross. You'd never know it to look at him. He's a good character for non-human Crewmembers to play. One can blame his odd appearance (albeit poorly) on his Colombian heritage.

CARLOS

Role: Protagonist's Sidekick

Type: Free-wheeling man of the world

Backstory: A rough and tumble criminal, Carlos strictly adheres to a strong ethical code. That code just doesn't prohibit things like smuggling and gun-running. He's in San Francisco while the heat in South America cools down, and is happy to help his old friend Dix.

Demeanor: Firm and strong, always at Dix's side and reluctant to leave it.

Goal: Protect Dix from his enemies; lay low until the head dies down back home.

Costume: A navy blue pinstripe suit, sharp tie and snap-brimmed fedora.

Quote: "My forehead? I was in an unfortunate gardening accident as a child. And I'll thank you not to stare."

GLORIA

An old girlfriend of Dix's, Gloria inherited a sizable fortune when her third husband—Cleveland shipping magnate Tony "Panama" Vinson—died of seafood poisoning. Now independently wealthy, she spends most her time running Tony's old company and enjoying the high life. She occasionally returns to San Francisco to visit her friend Dix, and became involved in several important cases of his. She loves the excitement of his hard-boiled life, and relishes her infrequent trips to the West Coast. She'd like to help Dix out financially, but knows he'd never take charity.

Gloria is Dix's equal in many ways. She's smart, tough, and has a propensity to think on her feet that always impressed the rumples P.I. Together the two can fast-talk their way almost anywhere. They tell others that they're cousins, which has become something of a private joke; no one ever seems to believe them.

GLORIA

Role: Protagonist's Sidekick

Type: Merry widow

Backstory: A former girlfriend of Dix's who married wealthy and inherited it all when her husband died. She now travels the country, keeping tabs on her shipping company and enjoying life to the fullest.

Demeanor: Sly, clever, mischievous. Has a penchant for fast-talking; her wit gets her in and out of trouble.

Goal: To have fun and be with Dix; Dix's adventures are more enjoyable than anything she can think of.

FILM NOIR AND STAR TREK

Film noir stories and *Star Trek* have very little in common thematically. Noir is full of corruption and deceit, greedy characters, sinister plots, and the dark side of the soul. *Star Trek* is hopeful and bright, highlighting humanity at its very best. Getting the two to work together, even on the holodeck, can present a challenge. Try evoking the atmosphere and feel of noir while keeping the plot itself in the *Star Trek* vein. The surroundings should be dark and dangerous, with lots of shadows and high-contrast lighting. Stage the action at night, and hint at the dark secrets of the depraved characters they meet.

Once you've established the mood and the Crew has a good feel for the setting, you can switch gears a little bit. Emphasize the story's puzzle-solving aspects and the need to bring a killer to justice. Stress the mystery's challenge and the satisfaction of discovering the truth. A lot of noir protagonists have their own individual codes of morality. The Crew's Federation principles can serve the same purpose in the dark and seedy world of Dixon Hill.

Also remember that Starfleet Crewmembers aren't as familiar with noir trappings as we are. Let the Crew have fun playing up those misconceptions, lightening the mood considerably: "But why would I need a pair of cement galoshes, Mr. Fatmann? They don't sound very useful...."

In the end this is still a *Star Trek* story and the action should reflect that. Bend a few noir rules to fit into the *Star Trek* world. For example, 1940s crimes stories featured very few female detectives: women mostly played femme fatales or innocent victims. In *Star Trek* women play a much more active role, and their holodeck recreations reflect that. So if a female character wants to play "Dixinia Hill," that shouldn't present a problem. None of the holodeck characters treat her any differently than a male in the part.

Costume: Fashionable dress, black stockings, sunglasses.

Quote: "Talk to me, big fella; I'm a great listener."

REX

The owner of Rex's Bar, just down the street from Hill's office, has become Dix's permanent sympathetic ear. Like most bartenders, he's friendly and outgoing, although tough as nails if pushed too far. He considers himself quite a ladies' man, and can be expected to turn the charm on whenever a member of the fairer sex enters his establishment. His brawny frame and wide smile can melt the hardest heart. Rex likes money, and always runs in some financial scheme or another. It hasn't brought him riches, but it makes things interesting; he's scraped against a number of heavy criminals, and Dix has had to pull him out of a few get-rich-quick schemes gone bad. In return, Rex lets the P.I.'s bar tab run a lot longer than any of his other regulars.

REX

Role: Protagonist's Friend

Type: Money-loving bartender

Backstory: The owner of Rex's Bar, Dixon Hill's favorite after-work watering hole. Rex likes his job, but hopes for a "big score" someday that will let him retire. He openly talks about such a score, and decided that marrying a rich woman is the best way to go about it. For all his talk of money, he's a good soul at heart, and would never do anything to jeopardize a friend. He's even let Dix's bar tab slide longer than Glenn Miller's trombone.

Demeanor: Gregarious, outgoing, friendly. Likes to talk.

Goal: To get rich and marry well.

Costume: Well-worn cotton shirt with sleeves rolled up and suspenders; a winning smile.

Quote: "Well hello, gorgeous. Say, are those real pearls?"

DETECTIVE PLUNKETT

Plunkett was Dix's first partner in the S.F.P.D.; while Dix left to pursue a career as a P.I., Plunkett moved steadily through the ranks until he earned the position of homicide detective. His cases sometime bring him into contact with Dix, and he does what he can to share the Department's resources. Although he never understood why Dix left the force, he knows a good source when he sees one. The two still get together occasionally and share a drink; when Dix gets in trouble with the law, Plunkett does his best to help him out.

Plunkett's a good solidier in every sense of the word. He does his job and follows orders from higher-ups without question. While Dix believes rules should be bent sometimes, Plunkett believes in the law, and won't consciously break it. He has a wife and children he cares about very much; he's vowed to protect them from the seedy reality of the cold hard city.

LT. PLUNKETT

Role: Protagonist's Friend

Type: Dedicated cop

Backstory: Plunkett wanted to be a policeman all his life. Dixon Hill was his original partner, but while Dix left to become a P.I., Plunkett stayed with the force, eventually becoming a homicide detective. He firmly believes in the rightness of the law, but is willing to bend the rules a bit for people he counts among the good guys (like Dix).

Demeanor: Calm, deliberately non-threatening. Concerned for the well-being of "good people," and for punishing those who do wrong.

Goal: To uphold the law and bring the guilty to justice.

Costume: Rumpled jacket, loose tie, wide-brimmed hat. He carries his service revolver at all times.

Quote: "My three-year-old could come up with a better alibi than that."

MADELINE

Madeline is Dixon's secretary, a permanent fixture in his outer office. Brassy and blond, she takes Dix's phone messages and makes sure he keeps appointments with clients. She's worked for him more than five years, and has become used to his more unsavory associates. You can't intimidate Madeline easily. She speaks with a thick working-class accent and often chews gum. While not overly intelligent, she's hard-working and quietly loyal to her employer. She'd never consciously betray Dix's confidence. Madeline follows news of the ongoing Second World War closely, and believes America shouldn't get involved in the conflict. She likes to talk about it, and not-so-subtly inserts the topic into any casual conversation.

MADELINE

Role: Sidekick

Type: Secretary

Backstory: A loud but friendly assistant to Dixon Hill, Madeline is loyal to her boss and tries to help him out whenever possible.

Demeanor: Brassy, tough, friendly in an in-your-face kind of way.

Goal: To do her job and help Dix remember the little things (like paying the rent-and the employees).

Costume: Low-cut dress in the latest style, pumps and stockings.

Quote: "Mr. Hill is takin' a meetin' right now. Nothin' personal, toots."

SUPPORTING CAST CHARACTERS

The computer controls these central figures—allies and antagonists in the scenario—and Crewmembers should not be allowed to play them. All their statistics apply to the America of the 20th century only; they know nothing beyond the program's parameters.

HARRY GOODWIN

The late Harry Goodwin was one of England's most prominent archaeologists. Educated at Oxford, he became a noted expert on Aztec and Mayan civilizations and participated in some of the most important digs of the 20th century. He used his fame to live far above his means, attending exotic parties and spending money like there was no tomorrow. He was particularly fond of gambling, and was often found anywhere from Switzerland to Monte Carlo playing cards or dice.

His habit soon got him into trouble, running up debts he couldn't possibly pay. When banned from legitimate gaming houses, he turned to the underground, where his luck grew worse. He avoided most debts by going out into the field until he earned cash to pay them off. But it wasn't enough, and eventually he fled his native England ahead of his collectors.

His marriage to the beautiful San Francisco ingenue Katherine Sinclair brought some respite; she paid off his debts and seemed to have turned him back to the path of righteousness. For a few years theirs was a blissful marriage; however, it didn't last. Between digs Harry continued to gamble and lose. He used his wife's money to stay out of trouble, but she soon found out, and they began to argue. The arguments grew into fights, which grew into recriminations. As the marriage soured, he fell into the arms of the couple's maid, Annie Cassidy. The affair grew in passion and intensity; when Katherine cut off Harry's money, he promised Annie he'd divorce her as soon as he was able.

Harry's last trip to Mexico was tinged with fear; he owed over thirty thousand dollars to San Francisco crime lord Jeremiah Fatmann, and left the city just as the leg-breakers were coming to collect. He couldn't ask Katherine for the money and couldn't go back to the States without funds. Those on the dig with him commented on how dedicated he seemed. In truth, the dig was all that kept him alive.

His fortunes changed again with the discovery of the Golden Serpent—or so he believed. The beautiful statue was worth millions, and if he could smuggle it back to San Fran, his troubles would be over. He could divorce Katherine, pay off Fatmann, and live the rest of his life worry-free. Through the help of Mexican official Jorge Villa Lobos, he got the statue into the U.S. and told his debtors he had their money.

It's a pity Katherine found out....

KATHERINE GOODWIN

The beautiful Katherine Sinclair thought she found the man of her dreams with Harry Goodwin. He was intelligent, well-bred and had one of the most fascinating jobs in the world—much different than the usual lay-about playboys. She didn't mind paying off his debts, and used her considerable charisma to straighten things out with his creditors. She thought it would make him a better man. Their wedding was a highlight of the San Francisco social scene.

For a few years they were blissfully happy. Then he started gambling again, and things went south. She told herself she was angry that he lied to her; in truth, she was angry because he rejected her efforts to change him. No one defied her like that. Ever. And she wanted to make sure no one would again. Their arguments reflected a colossal battle of wills between them.

He slowly took her fortune and drained it dry; although they still had the trappings of wealth, their accounts were empty. When she learned of his affair with Annie Cassidy, her anger turned to murder. She knew he owed money and had brought a fabulous artifact back from Mexico to pay it off. She coerced Annie to steal it for her, and now plans to wait until Fatmann disposes of her husband for her. When it's all over, she'll take the Serpent for herself as payment for the hell he's given her.

Katherine knows how to ply her feminine wiles to get what she wants. She's always been manipulative, but in her sparring with Harry, she's become Machiavellian. She does whatever it takes to get what she wants, including seduce a hard-boiled P.I. While poor as a church mouse, she still has the sheen of wealth: nice clothes, a big house and a secret agenda to regain it all.

ANNIE CASSIDY

Annie is the Goodwin's maid and Harry's lover. A former actress and small-time thief, this hard-luck redhead originally became a maid to case rich people's houses. She quickly learned it was easier going legit, and became a servant full-time. Before falling in love with Harry, she amassed an exemplary service record. But like Katherine before her, Annie was quite taken with Harry's charms. He promised he'd divorce Katherine for her, make her rich beyond her dreams. For a hard-luck redhead, Annie could be extremely naïve.

When Katherine confronted her with evidence of the affair, she was terrified. Katherine promised she wouldn't leave Harry destitute as long as Annie did her a favor: find the object Harry brought back from Mexico and deliver it to her. Annie eagerly agreed, seeing it as the only way she and Harry could be happy. But she couldn't find it on her own. So, posing as Mrs. Goodwin to keep her identity safe, she contacted private eye Dixon Hill to find it for her....

Annie has no interest in the Serpent; she just wants to live in peace with Harry. When she learns Harry was killed, she begins to fear for her own life. She sees the statue as the only thing keeping her alive, and tries to use it as a desperate bargaining chip. Unfortunately, it won't do her much good.

JEREMIAH FATMANN

The corpulent Mr. Fatmann runs gambling and prostitution rings in the San Francisco underworld. He's ruthless and corrupt, and doesn't tolerate anyone interfering in his affairs. He let Harry Goodwin's credit run, assuming his wife had the money to pay it off. When he found out otherwise, he became very angry. Harry Goodwin took a one-way trip to the bottom of the Bay soon thereafter.

Now Fatmann wants the Serpent as payment for the money owed him. He knows Dixon Hill has something to do with its disappearance and leans on the P.I. to get him to talk. If he learns Annie Cassidy has the object, he stops at nothing to find her. The obese Fatmann rarely moves anywhere on his own, but has a small army of thugs willing to do his dirty work. The Crew doubtless tangles with them sometime during the adventure.

Jeremiah's name is pronounced "Fahtmun." Mispronouncing it can sign your death warrant (he's sensitive about his weight). Dixon Hill knows the correct pronunciation (make sure you inform the

NEW SKILLS

The following skills have little practical use in the 24th century, but are often used in Dixon Hill's San Francisco.

Police Procedure (Intellect)

This skill represents a character's knowledge of the *modus operandi* of local law enforcement officials. It reflects his competence at navigating the often labyrinthine police bureaucracy and regulations.

Primitive Lockpicking (Coordination)

The Security skill in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG* covers complex computerized locks and systems. This new skill covers more primitive locks, such as those found in 1940. Characters must use specific picks to attempt a task with this skill, equipment a good private investigator is likely to keep handy.

Mechanical Repair (Intellect)

The ability to fix various machines of the 1940s, including automobiles.

Photography (Intellect)

Characters use this skill when operating the primitive cameras and recording devices of mid-20th century Earth.

Crewmember playing Dix), and knows what happens to people who forget it.

NICKI THE NOSI

Fatmann's biggest rival in San Francisco is the less-rotund Nicki the Nose. Legend has it someone bit off Nicki's sniffer off in a street fight when he was a boy. Whatever the truth, he lost his nose at an early age and replaced it with a steel replica. The sight of it strikes fear into the hearts of rivals and underlings alike. He runs an empire of rackets, underground casinos and other illicit operations from his club, the Blue Delilah. Despite (or perhaps because of) its owner's reputation, the place is packed with the cream of society every night.

Nicki's vicious and corrupt, but he has a distorted sense of honor Dix used to his benefit in the past. Dix treats him with respect, and even though the two are often foes, the gangster admires the P.I.'s moxie. Nicki's interest in the Serpent is purely financial; he wants the millions the statue will bring and is unwilling to see his rival get it. Possessing the Serpent means less to him than denying it to Fatmann; if giving it up means Jeremiah won't get it, he'll happily let it go. Canny Crews can use this to their advantage.

JORGE VILLA LOBOS

Jorge represents the Mexican government in the port of San Francisco, helping settle trade disagreements and watching for smuggled contraband from his country. He's also not above looking the other way for certain shipments, and built quite a nest egg in

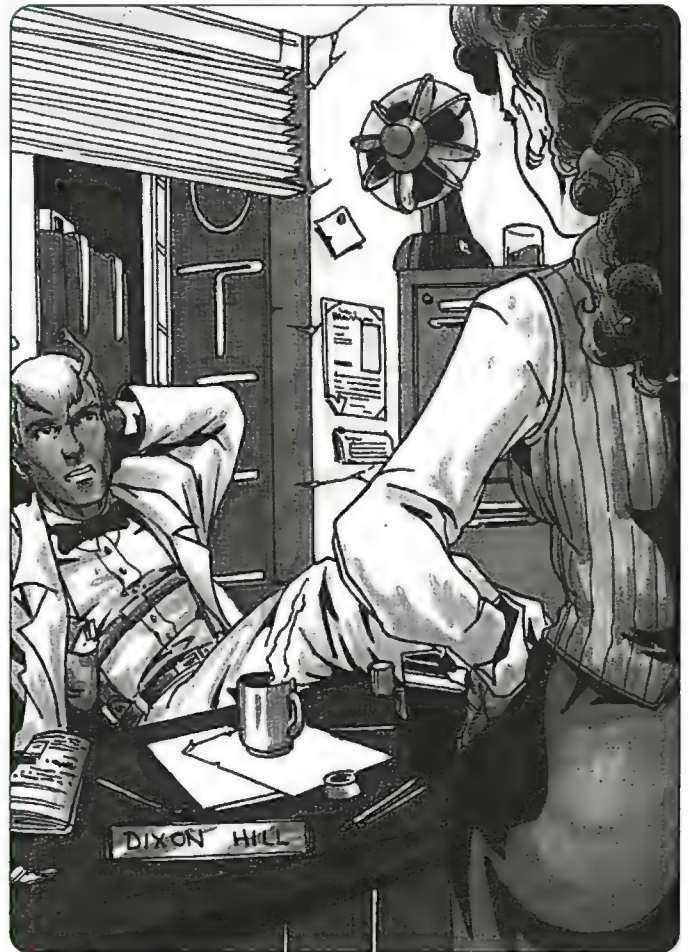
illicit bribes. Jorge allowed Goodwin to arrive here with the Serpent in exchange for a cut of the money. Through his efforts the San Francisco Port Authority never knew the Serpent existed. With Harry dead and the search for the Serpent growing out of control, he wants to get it back; he doesn't want his government learning of his involvement.

SYNOPSIS

Although this synopsis provides background and an overview of the plot, keep in mind that the Crew knows very few of these details from the outset; they must learn them as the adventure develops.

San Francisco, 1941. Harry Goodwin, a prominent English archaeologist and expert on Aztec culture, owes considerable gambling debts to San Francisco crime lord Mr. Fatmann. On a recent trip to the Yucatan, he uncovered a fabulous statue of the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl carved of pure gold. About a foot and a half high, it could easily be smuggled into the country—and was worth more than enough to pay off Goodwin's debts. He brings it to San Francisco, intending to hand it over to Mr. Fatmann as soon as he can.

His wife, however, has other plans. Katherine Goodwin recently learned Harry was having an affair with their maid, Annie Cassidy. She wants him dead,



If none of the Crewmembers portrays Madeline, you should use the attributes and skills detailed here:

Madeline

Fitness: 2

Coordination: 3

Intellect: 2

Perception: +1

Presence: 3

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Charm 1, Fast Talk 2, First Aid 1, Law 2, Persuasion 2, Primitive Lockpicking 2, Search 2, Stealth 1, Streetwise 3, Vehicle Operation (Automobile) 1 (2)

Traits: Alertness +2

Resistance: 2

Wound Levels: 2/2/2/2/2/0

and sees the Golden Serpent as a way to do it without getting caught. Confronting Annie with evidence of the affair, she threatens to take everything from Harry unless she hides the Serpent for a few days. The terrified Annie agrees, but can't find the Serpent. So she hires P.I. Dixon Hill to find it for her. Enter the Crew.

Hill (and his friends, if there are any) finds the Serpent easily and turns it over to Annie. Unwilling to give it to Mrs. Goodwin right away, she hides it in the basement of Dixon's office building and tells no one of its location. Mr. Fatmann, angered at his missing payment, orders Goodwin killed. He then begins combing the city in search of the statue. Her initial goal accomplished, Mrs. Goodwin now wants the Serpent back; she hires Dixon Hill to find it, revealing that Annie lied to him.

Meanwhile, the Serpent has drawn other parties' interest—including Fatmann's rival Nicki the Nose and Jorge Villa Lobos, the corrupt Mexican official who allowed the object into the country. Dixon must sift through these elements to discover the truth and find the Serpent before anyone else does; how that happens is up to the Crew. They must put the clues together, interview the right people and stay tough when the heat turns up. If they can do that (and hey, this is Dixon Hill we're talking about), they'll finish the adventure with flying colors.

The Crew achieves victory by recovering the stolen Serpent and returning it to the proper authorities (the police or the Mexican government). They must also prove Mrs. Goodwin's involvement in her husband's murder.

Katherine Goodwin, Mr. Fatmann and Nicki the Nose are all trying to get the Serpent for its pure value. They win (and the Crew fails) if they can walk out of a scene with the object in their hands.

Poor Annie Cassidy was trying to protect her lover, and now just wants to stay alive. She'll do anything anyone says as long as they protect her.

Unfortunately, her chances of making it through the adventure are slim....

Harry Goodwin is dead, and doesn't have goals anymore. For the big turkey who started this whole mess, he gets off easy.

THE ADVENTURE

CHAPTER ONE: AN OFFER FOR DIXON HILL

The action starts in Dixon Hill's office, a shoddy, two room affair in a seedy building near downtown San Francisco. Music plays from a small radio in the corner, and a few dusty newspaper clippings hang on the walls. Sounds of Madeline typing come from the front room. A framed picture of Franklin Roosevelt dominates one corner. Dixon (and any other Crewmembers the Narrator feels should be there) sits at his desk, waiting for someone named Mrs. Goodwin, with whom he has an appointment. At 2:10 a small, red-headed woman wearing a fox fur and sunglasses strides in, introducing herself as Mrs. Goodwin. This is actually Annie Cassidy, pretending to be her employer. She acts self-assured and confi-

ANNIE CASSIDY

Role: Femme Fatale

Type: Maid/Mistress

Backstory: The Goodwin's maid, Annie, fell in love with her employer and was involved in an affair with him for some time. Katherine's blackmailing her to find the Golden Serpent, and Annie does anything to find it.

Demeanor: Calm and collected on the surface, terrified underneath.

Goal: In the beginning, to get the Serpent to save Harry from Katherine. Later on, anything to stay alive.

Costume: Alluring blue dress, fur coat, heels. She first appears to the Crew wearing Katherine's clothes.

Quote: "I'll do whatever you want. Just help me."

Fitness: 2

Coordination: 3

Intellect: 2

Presence: 4

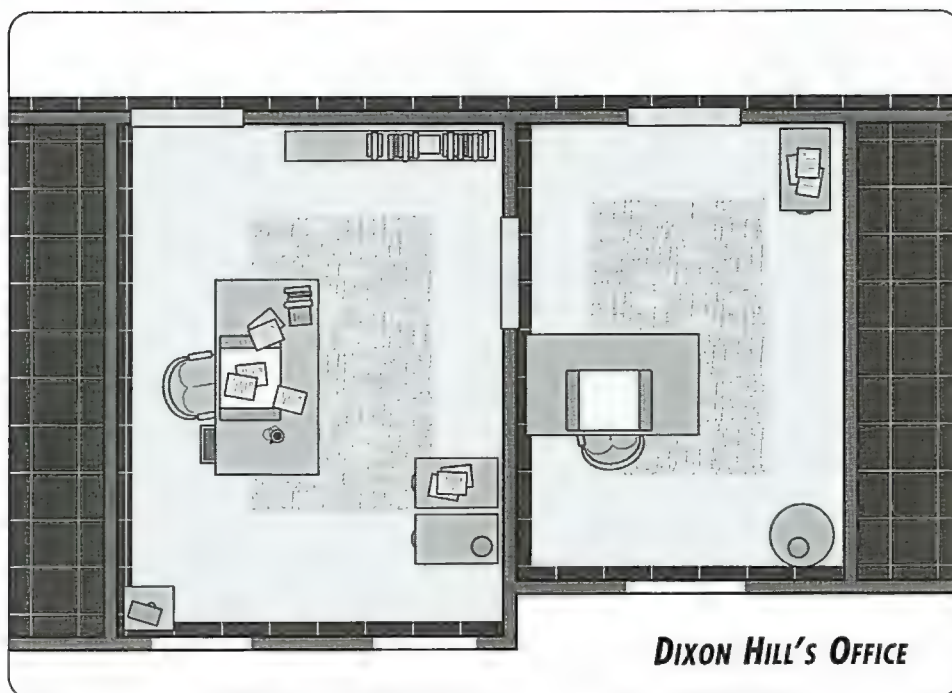
Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Artistic Expression (Acting) 1 (2), Charm (Seduction) 2 (3), Disguise 3, Fast Talk 3, Law (20th century United States) 1 (2), Persuasion (Cajole) 3 (4), Search 1, Streetwise (San Francisco) 2 (3)

Traits: Sexy +2

Resistance: 2

Wound Levels: 2/2/2/2/2/0



from the office. The taxi easily loses any pursuers.

Troubleshooting: There's a chance the characters won't take "Mrs. Goodwin's" offer. Or they might get suspicious and check out their mysterious client's story. Either way, they won't go looking for the Serpent, and the Narrator must improvise.

If Dixon Hill doesn't help Annie, she continues searching for the Serpent on her own. She finds it, and then the gangsters kill Harry. Now on the run, Annie hides the Serpent in the locker as she would if Dix had brought it to her. Katherine Goodwin still approaches Dix, asking him to recover the Serpent; she knows Annie visited him before vanishing. The adventure should proceed as normal from there.

Annie's cover story is fairly

dent, greeting Dixon coolly and eyeballing anyone else in the room before getting down to business.

"My husband Henry and I have been having marital difficulties for some time. He's been seeing another woman, and I believe he's stealing money from me. Recently, I noticed a valuable object of mine disappeared from our house: a gold statue from Mexico. I believe Harry stole it to pay for his debts. I need you to find it for me. In addition to recovering my property, you'll give me the leverage I need to file for divorce. Will you help me?"

If asked, she produces a driver's license (forged) and other papers "proving" she's Mrs. Goodwin. She agrees to whatever fee the Crew asks (Hill charges twenty dollars a day plus expenses) and provide a down payment up front. She can give them a basic background on Harry and "herself" (Katherine), and provides a key to the Goodwin estate, as well as a description of the Serpent. She keeps her comments as truthful as possible, and lies only when absolutely necessary to maintain her cover. She says she already searched the house for the object (including safes and other locations), but may have missed something. It's imperative, she implores, that Dix find the statue as quickly as possible. "The longer you wait, the better the chance Harry has to pawn it or get rid of it somehow." (In truth, Annie wants the Serpent because Mrs. Goodwin has to get it quickly, or else.)

From here the Crew can go in two different directions: They can check out the Goodwin estate and search for the object there, or try down at the docks where Harry's boat from Mexico lies moored. When they've concluded their business, Annie gives them a number where she can be reached (a diner pay phone), and tells them to call her as soon as they have it. She then thanks the Crew and leaves, taking a taxi

tight, and the characters have no reason to suspect she's not who she claims. She's smaller than Mrs. Goodwin, but looks similar enough so a basic description matches both women. Very few pictures of the real Katherine Goodwin exist, aside from a few grainy photographs in old newspaper social sections.

The only real flaw in her story concerns the Serpent itself; she claims it was stolen from the house, when in fact it's just arrived from Mexico and never left the docks. (She has no idea where the Serpent came from, only that it belongs to Harry.) Sharp characters might notice this discrepancy as the investigation continues; it's the only way to really pierce Annie's ruse.

THE GOODWIN ESTATE

The Goodwin's estate is the Crew's first logical stop, a sumptuous house located in an exclusive neighborhood just south of the Presidio. The wrought iron gates are open as the Crew approaches, leading to a small but tasteful front yard. "Mrs. Goodwin's" key fits in the front lock, and the Crew may case the house as they see fit. No one is home to interrupt them; Harry's out trying to set up a meeting with Mr. Fatmann and Katherine is wine-tasting at a vineyard in Napa, securing her alibi.

Inside the house reeks of taste and money. Persian rugs decorate the floor and mahogany furniture appoints every room. Avant-garde artwork hangs on the walls. Artifacts from Harry's expeditions stand throughout the house. All of them reflect an Aztec or other Central American background. Harry's study contains numerous books, mostly dry material on history and archaeology. Katherine's rooms reflect her jet-set life: numerous closets full of clothes, a small

wet bar and a full-length mirror in the bedroom. Everything is clean and in good shape; Annie dusts on a regular basis.

Ask the Crew to describe how they conduct their search of the Goodwin estate. While many of the Aztec knick-knacks are valuable, none match the description of the Golden Serpent. They won't find any hidden rooms or secret compartments in the house, and all the safes have been checked. "Mrs. Goodwin" made it clear Harry didn't have any regular hangouts or other places where he may have hidden the object. Anyone making a Moderate (7) Search check discovers several clues pointing to the location of the Serpent, and the larger mystery surrounding its disappearance. Narrators should be sure to mask these clues amid other mundane details, not making them too obvious:

- Within Harry's desk—hidden amid a sheaf of boring currency lists—is an invoice from the San Francisco docks. It shows a shipment in his name arrived from Cancun, Mexico, a few days ago. The manifests shows numerous crates and packages in his name are stored at the docks.
- Someone finds a pair of ledgers among Mrs. Goodwin's things. They indicate the Goodwins are nearly broke. Besides their property and material goods, they have only about a thousand dollars in the bank. Stocks, bonds and T-bills have all been sold off in recent months. The books list several substantial payments under the heading "Mr. F."
- Investigators notice several pictures of Harry throughout the house, but none of Mrs. Goodwin. Annie hid Katherine's photographs to help conceal

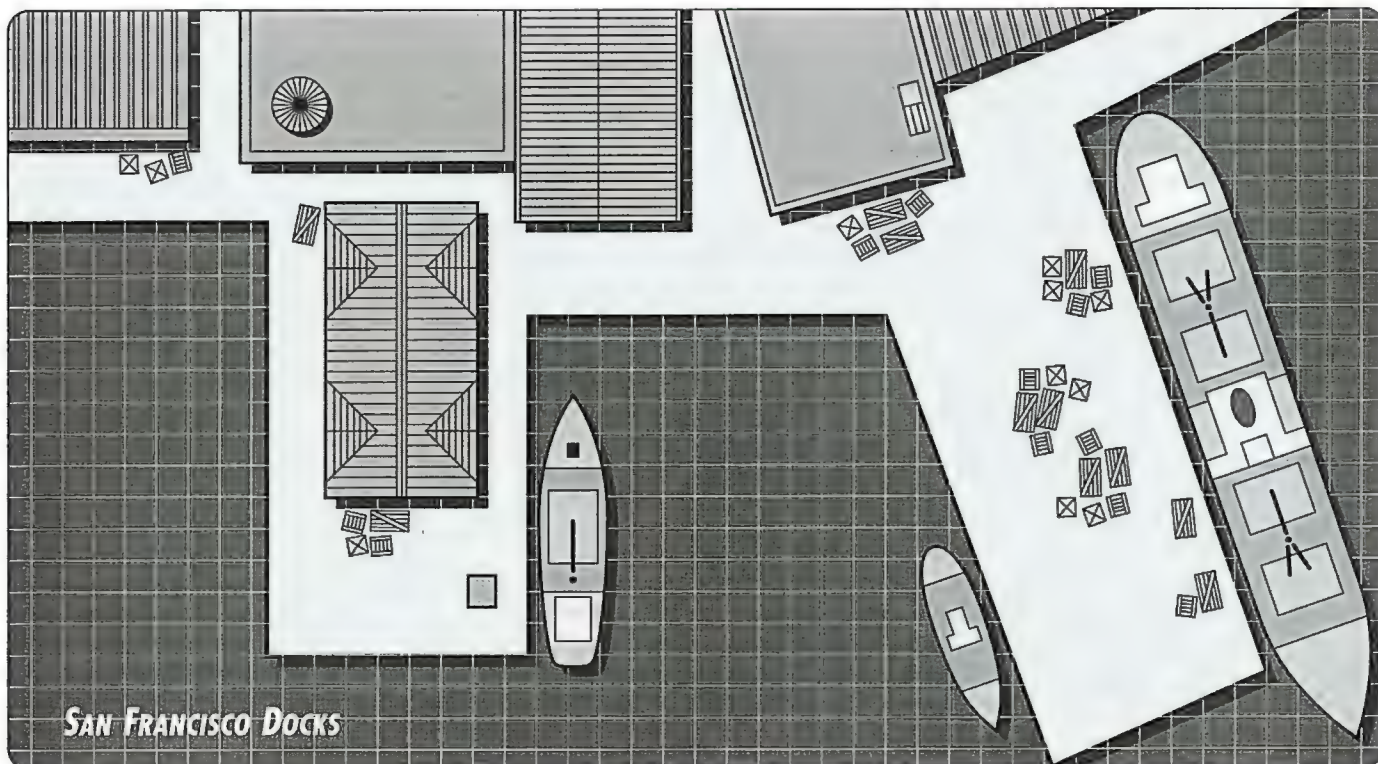
her scheme. It takes a very canny character to notice this—one who makes a Challenging (9) Search check—unless someone specifically asks about pictures of Harry and Katherine. Otherwise, just hint at it through other descriptions; tell them they see pictures of Harry, friends, and family members, but neglect to mention any pictures of Katherine. Perhaps they won't even remember it until the real Katherine pays a call.

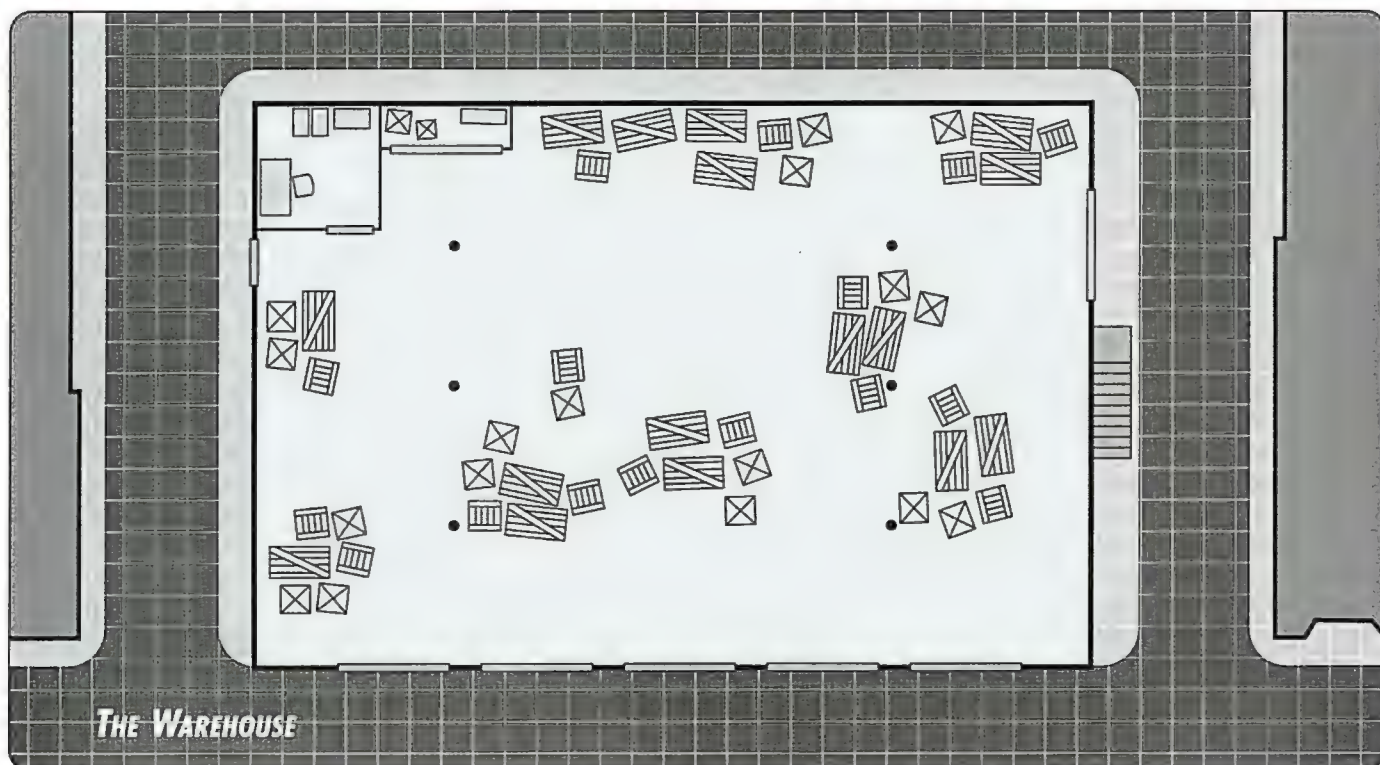
The invoice in Harry's desk should lead the characters to the docks.

Troubleshooting: The shipment from Cancun might make some Crewmembers suspicious of their employer. It suggests Harry was on an expedition (he was) and has only just returned. If this is so, then how could he have stolen a "valuable heirloom" so quickly? If confronted, Annie openly admits he was out of the country, and she noticed the item missing when she "came home to welcome him back." He could have easily taken it the minute he walked in the door, she insists. She didn't mention the expedition because she didn't think it was important. They can't learn anything further from the incident, but it sheds doubt on "Mrs. Goodwin's" true intentions.

THE SAN FRANCISCO DOCKS

The Crew arrives here prompted by the invoice found at the Goodwins or on their own. As an archaeologist, Harry has numerous packages sent to him from overseas, and uses the docks as a departure point for several prominent expeditions. It's natural to assume he may have hidden the Serpent here.





The wharf district is full of activity no matter the time, as longshoremen unload cargo, fisherman return with their catches, and sailors jostle their way out on shore leave. Seagulls complain to each other over scraps, while burly workers grimly go about their business. Boats are docked at nearly every pier, and numerous warehouses crowd the nearby streets. The smell of seawater and rotting fish fills the air.

The dockmaster (a surly Scottish fellow named McTeague) is reluctant to help the Crewmembers at first, but a flash of the P.I.'s license and a healthy ten flashed under his nose opens up his books. He knows Harry by sight and reports the Englishman just came back from a long trip to southern Mexico. He stored

almost all of what he brought back in a nearby warehouse. Searching the building produces a number of crates in Goodwin's name, each stamped with the word "Cancun" on the sides. The crates contain masks, sacrificial knives, pottery and other trinkets bound for various museums. They all come from an Aztec pyramid uncovered in the Yucatan jungles. None of it's worth anything to anyone but an academic; they have historic value, but contain no precious metals. Each item appears on the dockmaster's manifest, and nothing seems missing.

If the Crew checks the records carefully—requiring a Moderate (8) Search Test—they notice a second warehouse holding objects in Harry's name. It doesn't state what artifacts are stored there, but McTeague seems to remember they aren't from Mexico. "Junk from the Orient," he recalls. If the Crew questions the dock workers, some of them remember Harry "sneaking around" the second warehouse just a couple of days ago. They thought it odd because they unloaded all his crates into the first warehouse long before.

Harry's storage area in the second building contains crates labeled "China." Each contains a straw-packed statue, many depicting serpents or dragons. Most are made of brass or other cheap metals, with glass gems adorning them. Finding the one Mrs. Goodwin wants takes some digging. (The "Oriental" statues are actually all domestic—they come from San Francisco's Chinatown, where Harry bought them in gross. He's using them to hide the Serpent while he contacts Mr. Fatmann, in case someone comes looking for it.)

A thorough search (requiring the Crew to go through the entire pile of crates) produces one single box, buried beneath all the others, marked "Cancun"

GETTING AROUND IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Crewmembers unfamiliar with 20th century internal combustion engines might have a difficult time traveling from place to place; the Vehicle Operation skill usually doesn't apply to ancient relics like a '39 Packard. Dix has a car, but it's going to take a while to figure out how to use it (which could lead to some amusing role-playing: think of Captain Kirk in "A Piece of the Action"). More prudent characters may want to take a taxicab, or use the city's cable car system.

Gas-powered vehicles in the 1940s ranged from Packards to Dusenbergs to old Fords. Most cars in San Francisco were American, although wealthy people might own prewar vehicles from England and Germany. Assume all cars are capable of reaching a top speed of 130 kilometers per hour, and provide an Armor protection of 12 to those inside or crouched behind them.



instead of "China." Inside, they find the Serpent carefully wrapped in oil cloth. While its gold surface isn't obviously different than the polished brass of the other statues (it hasn't been polished), the differences are noticeable to the observant eye. It's considerably heavier than the others, and the fierce feathered serpent is a far cry from the Oriental snakes and dragons of the other sculptures.

When they find the Serpent, some character may begin suspecting Annie lied to them. If it just arrived from Mexico, how could Harry have stolen it from the estate? A few signs suggest it was placed here after the cargo arrived—a fortunate break for Annie. The Serpent isn't listed on the dockmaster's invoice, and the nails on the crate lid were pried up and re-hammered very recently (a result of Harry checking to make sure the Serpent was still there). Someone trying to hide a stolen object could have cleverly sealed it amidst an international shipment: an excellent hiding place. Point this out to the Crewmembers if anyone suspects Annie's story.

Getting the Serpent away from the docks should be easy. All the cargo's been cleared by customs and can be removed without difficulty. If the characters mention to McTeague that they're taking a statue, he shrugs and says they're welcome to it. As far as he's concerned, they're collecting their rightful property.

Troubleshooting: Thematically it's important for Dixon to find the Golden Serpent early, but not realize its true value. That way he turns it over to Annie, who promptly vanishes—leaving Dix feeling like he had the key to the puzzle and let it get away.

If the Crew gains the Serpent and wants to hold onto it (very likely if they suspect their employer), Annie lets it go for now. The statue is "safe" with them, which is enough to meet Mrs. Goodwin's demands. She calls Mrs. Goodwin and tells her Dix has it, then arranges for a distraction to allow a thief to swap the goods. Katherine then arrives at Dix's office (with lawyers in tow, if necessary) asking for her property. When Dix produces it, they realize it's a fake—one of the Chinese statues from the docks. Someone broke into his office and replaced the real Serpent with a phony. Now Dix has to find the Serpent...or be arrested for robbery.

The thief, in this case, is a small-time gangster named Johnny "Eyes" Iessi. Annie let it slip to him where the Serpent was; he stole it and placed it in the post office box as Annie would have, planning to contact Mr. Fatmann and sell it. Nicki the Nose's men kill him, however, before he can reveal where he's hidden it. Annie mentions talking to Johnny about the statue in her diary, which the players can find at the Goodwin estate. They can check Johnny's apartment (substitute it for Annie's room, below), and find the locker key. Proceed with the rest of the adventure as normal.

CHAPTER TWO: MURDER!

Presumably Dixon and Company return with the Serpent and deliver it to Annie. She collects it in Dix's office and pays them for their time, plus a one hundred dollar bonus. Smiling and thanking them, she tucks the object under her arm, and strolls demurely out the door. Another case in the books for this private dick. Except....

A few days later, (the holodeck jumps the Crew forward), they open up the morning newspaper and see Henry Goodwin's face on the front page. "Prominent Archaeologist Murdered!" the headline screams. According to the article, Harry (who just returned from an important trip to Mexico) washed ashore last night after someone apparently dumped him in the Bay. Strangle marks around his throat indicate he was killed before entering the water. Suddenly this case looks far from closed.

As if possible murder implications aren't enough, Dix has a visitor waiting when he arrives at his office. A flustered Madeline explains the lady didn't have an appointment, but forced herself past the secretary anyway. She's waiting in Dix's office, a beautiful porcelain woman dressed in mourning black.

"Mr. Hill," she begins icily. "Have you ever seen me before?" When he answers in the negative, she continues.

"I'm Mrs. Katherine Goodwin. You secretary claims I hired you to find a missing object for me. But I've never met you, nor have I ever been in this filthy

KATHERINE GOODWIN

Role: Femme Fatale

Type: Scheming vixen

Backstory: A beautiful debutante and Harry's wife, Katherine had fallen out of love with her husband a long time ago. When she learned of his affair, she orchestrated his murder at the hands of gangsters. Now she wants the Golden Serpent as payment for all he took from her.

Demeanor: Sultry, seductive, convincing and intelligent. Can be sympathetic when she wants to.

Goal: To be rid of Harry and in possession of the Serpent. She's a rich woman whom Harry bled dry; the Serpent can return her to the lifestyle she's accustomed to.

Costume: Slinky black mourning dress, veil.

Quote: "My husband was selfish and weak. But that doesn't mean you have to be."

Fitness: 2

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 3

Perception +2

Presence: 4

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Bargain (Artwork) 2, Charm (Seduction) 3 (5), Culture (Earth) 3 (4), Languages-French (3), Persuasion (Exhort) 3 (4), Stealth 1, Vehicle Operation (Automobile) 1 (2)

Traits: Sexy +2 Strong Will +2, Vengeful (Harry) -1

Resistance: 2

Wound Levels: 2/2/2/2/2/0

building. You stole a statue from Harry, which got him killed, and I want an explanation right now."

Katherine knows exactly how Dix is involved in this whole affair, but she's not letting on. With Harry out of the way, she now wants to find the Serpent herself, which Annie hid. To do that, she needs to coerce Dix into helping her. Katherine plays the wronged wife to the hilt, grilling him about his recent job and implying that the loss of the Serpent actually triggered Harry's death—making Dix at least partially responsible.

After the Crew gives their explanations, she softens a bit (or at least appears to) and graces them with an explanation of her own.

"The Golden Serpent isn't an heirloom, Mr. Hill. It's an Aztec artifact, from somewhere in the jungles of Mexico. Harry got it on his last trip. My husband owed a lot of money to gangsters. I assume he brought this statue into the country to pay them off. When you took it, he had nothing to give them. So they killed him.

"Whoever this woman impostor was, she obviously wanted Harry out of the way. She used you to get

what she wanted. Fed you some story about needing to get the Serpent, and sent you out to find it. Once you had it, she could just sit back and wait for the gangsters to kill him." Katherine knows Annie hired them, but doesn't want them knowing that just yet.

If they ask what she wants, or why she's come here instead of going to the police, she quickly comes to the point. "I know this wasn't your fault. You had no reason to doubt this woman's story. I want the Serpent, Mr. Hill. If Harry brought it here, then it belongs to me. He's left me nothing but debts. You were the last person to see the Serpent, and I have faith in your investigative skills. I want to hire you to find the Serpent, this time for the real Mrs. Goodwin."

If they point out to Katherine that finding the killer is more important than the statue, she smiles wryly at them.

"Someone murdered my husband for the Golden Serpent, Mr. Hill. Find the Serpent and you find the killers."

In any case they should feel somewhat responsible for Harry's death and want to make amends by solving the murder. Taking Katherine's case should be a natural decision.

Troubleshooting: Despite the trouble they're in, the Crew might resist working for Mrs. Goodwin. Initially she appeals to their vanity: "Someone played you for a sucker, Mr. Hill. I imagine that would make you very mad." If they need further reasons to help her, she dangles the threat of criminal prosecution in front of them (technically they're accessories to murder). Even if they continue refusing to help her, they need the Serpent to clear themselves from the murder, and must find it regardless. Continue the adventure as normal, but without Mrs. Goodwin's presence.

If for some unknown reason they kill Mrs. Goodwin here, they're now wanted criminals. Finding the Serpent should come second to dodging the police. Play it by ear, but whatever happens, they've failed the scenario.

Katherine begins warming to Dix as he continues on the trail. The Narrator should include a few scenes where she talks to the Crew, and they get to know her a little better. She plies her wily charms in an attempt to seduce him, and makes as if she's slowly growing to like him. (In truth, she is; even her heart can melt.) She gradually reveals how hard it was being married to Harry, about their fights, about his troubles with the mob. She should always be played as an ally, however, and never betray her real motivations; Katherine claims she hated Harry in the end, but she never wanted him dead (a lie).

The Crew can wander through the following scenes in any order, depending on which leads they want to investigate. The players' decisions should govern which locations they visit and what they find there: don't force them anywhere just because the plot demands it. They should, however, feel the need to return to the office at least once or twice. If they want to use the phone, for example, they should do it there. Or the police might ask to meet them there at

GENERIC COP

Use these statistics for any policemen the Crew meets during the investigation. They interfere in any situation which looks suspicious, but might side with Dixon Hill if he's involved and makes a good case for his presence.

Fitness: 3

Strength +1

Coordination: 3

Intellect: 2

Perception +1

Presence: 3

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Athletics (Running) 1 (2), Dodge 1, Intimidation (Bluster) 2 (3), Law 20th century San Francisco 1 (2), Persuasion 2, Projectile Weapon (Pistol) (Submachine Gun) 2 (3) (3), Stealth 1, Streetwise (San Francisco) 2, Unarmed Combat (Street Fighting) 1 (2), Vehicle Operation (Automobile) 1 (2)

Special Skills: Administration (Police Procedure) 2 (3)

Resistance: 4

Wound Levels: 4/4/4/4/4/0

Policemen are armed with billy clubs and .38 revolvers.

the office for "a few questions." Maybe they're simply tired and need a place to think (emphasize the time spent investigating). In any case, at some point they must return so Annie can contact them (see "A Call From Annie" below for details). Beyond that, however, they're free to do as they please.

THE POLICE

A dead man has been pulled out of the Bay, so naturally the police are involved. Crewmembers may want to bait their hooks there and see what information they can catch. They might also get dragged in as accessories to the crime. The 36th Precinct, which first caught the squeal, handles the murder investigation. It's a dank, cramped station near the docks composed of crumbling linoleum and cast-iron furniture. The cops there work under harsh lighting on outdated equipment. They're used to dealing with rough types on the wharf, so they don't intimidate easily.

The watch sergeant can point the Crew to the officers in charge of the case: a pair of wise-cracking tough guys name Willis and Peterson. They're reluctant to reveal too much information, and take some convincing before letting on what they know. But if the characters are canny enough (Lt. Plunkett can help immeasurably if he's among the Crew), they're willing to let a few details slip. Roleplay the encounter, doling out information based on how well you feel the Crew makes their case.

The police know Harry owed money to numerous criminals, and believe he was killed for not paying debts. They don't know about the Serpent, however, nor do they know about Annie's affair with Harry (they're still piecing that together). They found Harry's ledger with the "Mr. F" notation, and believe it refers to Jeremiah Fatmann. He's no more than a suspect at this point, and notoriously difficult to pin down. However, Dix and his friends might reach him in ways the legitimate authorities can't. Mrs. Goodwin has an iron-clad alibi; she was at a party in Napa all weekend, and numerous guests saw her the night Harry was killed. She was, however, having marital difficulties, which may have been enough to inspire a murder plot.

The Crew has the opportunity to shed a great deal of light on the police investigation, although doing so may incriminate them as well. The existence of the Golden Serpent interests the police immeasurably: that much money is an instant motive. They're also eager to learn about Annie's affair with Harry. They've been trying to contact the Goodwins' maid ever since the murder; her romantic liaison makes her part in this plot more significant. The Crew must be careful how much they let on—the cops can be a useful tool, but expect information in return. If they learn the Crew was involved in Goodwin's affairs before he was killed, they may shift the investigation to them. If the police hear they stole the Serpent (whatever the justification), the Crewmembers may become the prime suspects.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SERPENT?

From this point forward the Crew must decide how to proceed. They know the false Mrs. Goodwin was the last one to see the Serpent, and they know underworld figures probably killed Harry for it. But who? And where's Annie (and the Serpent) now? The Crew has numerous leads to follow: visiting the scene of the crime (the docks), searching the Goodwin estate for clues, probing the underworld for news. Each of these leads is detailed below.

It may help Narrators to know exactly what happened to the Serpent. After leaving Dix's office, Annie went downstairs to the nearest post office branch and rented a P.O. box. Having wrapped the statue in oilcloth, she placed it in the box and locked it tight, planning to wait until Mrs. Goodwin contacted her before removing it. When Harry died, Annie panicked and fled to Nicki the Nose for help. Nicki agreed to put her up, and gave her a room in back of the Blue Delilah for a few days. She soon came to her senses—before Nicki could learn about the Serpent, she hid the key in the room there and kept moving. Now she's going from flophouse to flophouse, too scared to stay in one place for long. Fatmann's men are after her, as are Nicki's. After Dixon Hill and his friends follow some leads on Harry Goodwin's murder, she gives Dix a desperate call for help...

The Serpent remains hidden in the P.O. box the entire time. The unmarked key is hidden in a suitcase at the Blue Delilah, and Annie's on the run. It's up to the Crew to follow the clues provided reach Annie and find the Serpent.



Mrs. Goodwin does not accompany the Crew to the police. She's spoken to them already and (for obvious reasons) wants to limit their involvement as much as possible.

Troubleshooting: This scene can be adjusted slightly to emphasize the trouble Dix and friends are in, and also help them out if they're not getting anywhere. As they leave some location or another, a squad car might pick them up. They're taken to the station and interrogated for their part in the Goodwin affair (Lt. Plunkett, if he's among the Crew, is called in for a briefing instead of an interrogation). Peterson and Willis take the characters into a small room one by one and do their best to bully the truth out of them. (The Crew should be able to keep their cool, though; it's hard to be scared of holograms.) Eventually they're released with a warning not to leave town. In the course of the interrogation, the cops let slip some important piece of information: that Annie the maid can't be found, for example, or that Jorge Villa Lobos okayed all of Harry's shipments into the country.

This isn't a recommended way to get the Crew information (they should figure this out on their own), but as a last-ditch effort it can keep the adventure going. You might want to have the police rough them up as a warning; a few black eyes can do wonders toward restoring one's focus.

BACK TO THE DOCKS

The docks may seem like a dead end (after all, the Serpent isn't there anymore), but might provide some clues missed earlier. McTeague remembers the Crew from their prior encounter, and for another ten dollars happily helps them in any way possible.

Harry's body was found on the far side of the wharf, washed ashore with the trash and dead fish. If the characters like, they can examine the crime scene, although it doesn't tell them anything new. Harry's goods in the warehouses are still there; nothing has been taken.

A cursory search reveals something wrong, however: all the crates were ripped open and only crudely replaced. The nails cut deep gouges into the wood, as if torn up. The materials inside have been tossed around, and some are broken. The crate covers hang loose over the boxes, enough to fool a casual glance, but not sealed the way they should. It appears someone went through them looking for something, and didn't care about the damage he caused.

Harry brought Fatmann's men here to get the Serpent. When he couldn't produce it, they killed him and searched the crates themselves. They couldn't find the Serpent and left the place a shambles. A few dock workers recognized the thugs as part of Fatmann's crew. Unfortunately they're not talking for fear of reprisals. If the characters speak to them, it becomes clear they saw something, but are unwilling to discuss it.

Pressing them earns hostility and may lead to a fight; if combat occurs, assume one dock worker, armed with a long-hook, attacks each Crewmember. Combat should be non-lethal; gunplay is murder, and Crewmembers who shoot someone find themselves pursued by the police. The Crew can, however, appear as threatening as they want, and if they man-

DOCKWORKER

Fitness: 2

Strength +1

Coordination: 2

Reaction +1

Intellect: 1

Perception +1

Presence: 2

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Athletics (Lifting) 1 (2), Dodge 1, Gaming (Cards) 1 (2), Intimidation (Bluster) 2 (3), Primitive Weaponry (Club) 1 (2), Projectile Weapon (Pistol) 1 (2), Streetwise (San Francisco Docks) 2 (3), Unarmed Combat (Street Fighting) 2 (3)

Traits: Patron (union) +3

Resistance: 4

Wound Levels: 4/4/4/4/4/0

age to defeat the workers, might coerce the truth from them. Roleplay the situation using Intimidation checks, if necessary.

Checking the invoice in McTeague's office produces another tangible lead. All of Harry's "Cancun" crates were cleared from customs inspection by Mr. Jorge Villa Lobos of the Mexican Consulate. Because they weren't examined, the Serpent entered the country without anyone noticing; Mr. Villa Lobos seems to have orchestrated that. A check of the dockmaster's records turns up the Mexican's address: a small townhouse not far from the Goodwin estate.

McTeague neglects to mention that Nicki the Nose came here a day or so ago, looking for the Serpent. Nicki seemed to know Fatmann had been there and didn't bother searching the warehouses. The Nose asked if a "red-headed girl" was seen out here, and if so, where she might have been. McTeague hadn't seen such a girl and Nicki seemed satisfied. The Scotsman won't volunteer this information, but recalls it if asked about other people making inquiries or someone "unusual" appearing on the docks.

BACK TO THE GOODWIN ESTATE

Mrs. Goodwin accompanies the Crew on any trip back to her house. When they arrive, however, they find someone was there already...and left a mess. Furniture is overturned, drawers and cabinets opened and dumped, and papers scattered everywhere. The two big safes have been cracked open, although nothing was taken from within them. Katherine acts horrified and immediately begins picking things up. If someone suggests she call the police, she looks dazed for a moment, then agrees (this is a ruse; Katherine doesn't want the cops here).

If the Crew was here earlier, a Moderate (8) Perception Test reveals several pictures of Katherine scattered among the debris—pictures which weren't here earlier. This, coupled with the fact that the false Mrs. Goodwin had a key to the house, might prompt the characters to ask who might have normal access. Katherine answers that no one save herself, her husband and the maid have keys, although it's possible a copy was made. If they ask about the maid, Katherine replies that she "hasn't seen the girl since this whole business started."

Even if the Crew didn't notice the replaced pictures, they find the door to Annie's quarters locked. Katherine doesn't have the key, and seems quite upset that the lock is there. "She wasn't allowed to put one in without telling us." The door can be broken down with a good kick. Inside they find a small bedroom, bathroom and sitting room, dust-free and sparsely furnished. The place has a cluttered look, with things tossed around haphazardly. Yet it's a little different from the rest of the house; the drawers are empty and the bed unmade. It doesn't seem like someone was looking for something: it appears someone left in a big hurry.



There's a picture of Annie on the dresser, dressed in a chorus girl's outfit and smiling invitingly. The Crew instantly recognizes her as the false Mrs. Goodwin. Katherine nods slowly at the revelation, and mentions Annie used to be an actress. A search of the room reveals various knick-knacks, a few pulp romance novels, and a small book stuffed beneath the mattresses. One of the novels has a phone number written in the cover—the number of the Blue Delilah nightclub. The book is a diary, with daily entries from Annie going back almost two years.

It takes a little time to read, but reveals the full details of Annie's affair with Harry. By the descriptions, Annie seems completely smitten with her employer, and often mentions that he promised to divorce Katherine and marry her as soon as he could get enough money together.

If confronted with evidence of the affair, Katherine admits she knew about it (she figured they'd learn about Annie eventually). She paints it as more evidence of a marriage gone bad, and claims she didn't want to mention it if she didn't have to. She also acts extremely suspicious of Annie; her hiring Dix suggests that Annie orchestrated Harry's death.

If the players point out that she seems deeply in love with Harry in the diary, Katherine simply shakes her head. "Harry was a cad, Mr. Hill. If he broke my

heart, he's more than capable of breaking Annie's. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. Believe me, I know."

The diary entries end a few days before Annie came to Dix's office. It makes no mention of Mrs. Goodwin's blackmail, or of any plots besides the affair itself. The last page of the diary has been torn out and cannot be found anywhere in the house.

Troubleshooting: If the characters don't find Annie's diary here, they miss an important clue. The Narrator can reinsert it later in "A Call From Annie," below. When they encounter Fatmann later, he might mention that Annie and Harry were having an affair, and that he thinks "she hid the item for her snuggle-puss." (Katherine acts as she does above if confronted with this.) They discover the rest of the pertinent information on Annie's body.

JORGE VILLA LOBOS

The Mexican official who let the Serpent into the country lives in a quaint old townhouse near the Goodwin estate. It's not as nice as the Goodwins', but has a charm to it; several wide windows overlook the park across the street. Villa Lobos answers the door in a smoking jacket and invites the characters inside. He's a handsome man with wide dark eyes and a winning smile. He appears more than happy to talk to the characters.

Villa Lobos leads them to a sitting room in the front of the house, furnished with packed bookshelves and leather chairs. In one corner looms a menacing goon dressed in pinstripes and fingering his inside pocket. Anyone even remotely familiar with the Dixon Hill canon—making a Routine (3) Intellect Test—recognizes the goon as a member of Nicki the Nose's crew.

Villa Lobos offers the Crew a brandy and answers any questions. If they mention the shipments from Mexico, he claims ignorance to any wrongdoing. He plays things very cool, at least initially, and acts surprised if they mention the Serpent. "I'm in charge of clearing all imports from my home nation, señor. That's included Mr. Goodwin on numerous occasions. I trusted him, I felt him a man of his word. If he was bringing something into the country—like the Golden Serpent—he did so as a violation of my trust."

That story sprouts leaks the minute they bring up the thug. "The gentleman here is a representative of Mr. Nick Palatomo, better known as Nicki the Nose. After what happened to Goodwin, I didn't wish to take chances...and frankly, your police officers don't impress me as adequate bodyguards."

This statement doubtlessly prompts a slew of further questions. Why would Nicki the Nose want to help him? Who is he afraid of? Does he know something about who killed Goodwin? Villa Lobos continues to deny any wrongdoing, but becomes more and more flustered as he does. He eventually loses his temper and orders the Crew out. The goon

advances menacingly to emphasize the point. As this happens (or whenever you feel you've exhausted the scene's dramatic potential), everyone hears the sound of squealing tires outside.

The window shatters in a spray of machine gun bullets and glass, slamming into the books and sending the room's occupant's diving for cover. Villa Lobos takes several shots right in the chest, and the goon gets winged just as he pulls his pistol. Assuming the Crewmembers dive for cover, they won't get hit, and are free to return fire. The car pulls away once the rain of bullets dies down; even if the Crew hits it, it won't stop.

Villa Lobos is dead. Despite a heavily bleeding wound, the goon doesn't appear in immediate danger. If pressed, he reveals the truth about his purpose here. Villa Lobos took bribes for decades, allowing goods to be smuggled into the country. He knew about the Serpent and that Goodwin owed money to Mr. Fatmann. He planned to take a cut of the money in exchange for letting the Serpent into the country, but when Goodwin was killed, he got scared. Rather

JORGE VILLA LOBOS

Role: Supporting Cast

Type: Corrupt diplomat

Backstory: Villa Lobos oversees all imports into San Francisco from his native Mexico. He periodically allowed Harry Goodwin to smuggle valuable artifacts in exchange for a cut of the profits.

Demeanor: Smooth, eloquent, well-dressed. Very little visibly upsets him.

Goal: To cover up his illegal activities and return the Serpent to the Mexican government.

Costume: Silk suit, smoking jacket, expensive foreign cigarettes.

Quote: "I assure you, gentlemen, the Mexican government is unaware of such an impropriety."

Fitness: 2

Coordination: 3

Intellect: 4

Presence: 2

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Administration (Mexican Government) 2 (3), Charm (Influence) 1 (2), Culture (Mexican) 4 (5), Diplomacy (Commercial Treaties) 1 (2), Fast Talk 2, History (Mexican) 3 (4), Languages (English) 4, Merchant (Antiquities) 2 (3), Persuasion (Debate) 1 (2), Search 2, Streetwise (San Francisco Mob) 1 (2)

Traits: Patron (Harry Goodwin) +2, Patron (Mexican Government) +4, Dark Secret -2, Greedy -1

Resistance: 3

Wound Levels: 3/3/3/3/3/0



than go to the cops (who might find out about his own corruption), he went to Fatmann's rival, Nicki the Nose, for help.

Nicki saw Villa Lobos as a potential tool, and also wanted to keep the Serpent out of Fatmann's hands. So he sent the goon to protect him...and to keep an eye out for news of the Serpent. The goon assumes the hit came from Fatmann's men, who killed Villa Lobos because they don't want anyone else to know about the Serpent—least of all the cops.

The Crew can stay and wait for the police if they wish, or disappear as the sounds of sirens approach. The goon clams up and waits for his lawyer when the cops arrive; he won't say anything until long after the Serpent is found.

Troubleshooting: The Crew may be interested in talking to "Mr. F" after this encounter, or several others during the course of the adventure. Jeremiah Fatmann isn't easy to find. He maintains numerous gambling houses and other dens of ill repute across the city, but doesn't frequent many of them. The Crew might ask after him somewhere (Dix knows where several underground casinos are), or leave a message to contact them.

If they do, Fatmann takes notice—and shows up in Dix's office accompanied by his goons the next time the Crew returns there. Use the encounter in "A Call

From Annie" below, only set it in Dix's office instead of the diner.

CHAPTER THREE: A CALL FROM ANNIE

This event must occur before the Crew pieces everything together, but after they become aware of Annie's involvement (and her earlier appearance as Mrs. Goodwin). At some point they return to the office to recharge or perhaps make a call. When they arrive, they find Madeline speaking on the phone: "Hold on, he just walked in. Dix, there's a Ms. Cassidy on the phone. She's been trying to reach you all night."

Annie sounds panicked and scared on the other end. She asks if they remember her and apologizes for the ruse. She weepingly claims she didn't know Harry would die, and says she only masqueraded as Mrs. Goodwin to help him. She never thought it would bring harm to anyone. Now, however, she believes his killers are after her. "I don't know who to turn to; I need your help, Mr. Hill. They're going to kill me if you don't help. Please..."

If pressed, she claims she knows the Serpent's location, and tells the Crew if they promise to protect her. Assuming they agree, Annie says she's at the Easy Eats Diner, and will stay there until they come for her.

The Easy Eats is a 24-hour place in a slightly run-down neighborhood. Its harshly-lit counters play host to all manner of night people and insomniacs, and the booths in the back make an ideal place to avoid notice. A trio of phone booths line the back wall. As the Crew enters, they see numerous customers through the plate-glass windows.

GANGSTER THUGS

Fitness: 2

Strength +1

Coordination: 2

Reaction +1

Intellect: 1

Perception +1

Presence: 2

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Athletics (Running) 1 (2), Dodge 1, Gaming (Poker) 1 (2), Intimidation (Torture) 2 (3), Law (20th century San Francisco) 1 (2), Primitive Weaponry (Club) 1 (2), Projectile Weapon (Pistol) (Submachine Gun) 2 (3) (3), Streetwise (San Francisco Mobs) 1 (2), Unarmed Combat (Street Fighting) 1 (2), Vehicle Operation (Automobile) 1 (2)

Traits: Patron (crime boss) +3

Resistance: 4

Wound Levels: 4/4/4/4/4/0

JEREMIAH FATMANN

Role: Antagonist

Type: Gangster

Backstory: An obese and ruthless leader of organized crime, Fatmann floated Harry Goodwin's gambling debts and now wants restitution. The Serpent is his, and he always gets what's his.

Demeanor: Threatening, rude, very smug. Fatmann sweats profusely at all times.

Goal: To get the Serpent and kill anyone in the way. To revitalize his criminal empire to better compete with Nicki the Nose.

Costume: Double-wide gray suit and wingtip shoes. A large tan overcoat when the weather gets cold.

Quote: "You're breathing my air, smart guy."

Fitness: 1

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 4

Presence: 3

Willpower: +1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Bargain (Contraband) 2 (3), Command (Combat Leadership) 3 (4), Intimidation (Torture) 3 (4), Persuasion (Cajole) 2 (3), Projectile Weapon (Pistol) 3 (4), Streetwise (San Francisco Mobs) 4, Unarmed Combat (Boxing) 1 (2), Vehicle Operation (Automobile) 2 (3)

Traits: Contacts (Many) +3, Favored Owed (Many) +1, Shrewd +1, Strong Will +2, Greedy -1, Rival (Nicki the Nose) -2,

Resistance: 3

Wound Levels: 3/3/3/3/3/0

When the door closes behind them, however, they make a chilling discovery: all of the customers in the diner are mobsters. The short-order cooks goes about his business at gunpoint, while a tired-looking waitress partially conceals a pinstriped man with a Tommygun. The other patrons are similarly attired, and all aim their weapons at the Crew. Nobody sees Annie, but they can't miss Jeremiah Fatmann—he is sitting at the lunch counter. He chuckles sinisterly and lights a cigar as the Crewmembers realize their predicament.

"Hiya Dixie. What's shakin'?"

Fighting is not recommended here. The gangsters never drop their guard, and if the Crewmembers go for their weapons, they're gunned down in a moment (failing the scenario). The best option is to just play it cool and play along with "Mr. F."

Fatmann gets right to the point and asks them where they hid the Serpent. If they profess ignorance, he believes them, but makes it menacingly clear that he wants it anyway: "I think you wanna help me find it, Dix, if you know what's good for ya. I think you wanna help me find it lots."

Asking where Annie went provokes a laugh: "She took off just before you got here. Don't worry though, I'm having a couple of my boys bring her back, an' then we'll have a nice long talk."

Roleplay the conversation from here, and let the Crew play it as tough as they want. Fatmann admits to having Harry killed: "He owed me and couldn't pay; I gotta reputation to protect." He makes it abundantly clear that he considers the Serpent to be his property. As soon as Annie comes back, "we'll all go get it together." He encourages the players to tell him what they know, and becomes very angry if they decline.

Like the cops though, he shouldn't scare them too badly; he's a hologram. When the conversation runs its course (and the Crew has given all the tough-guy banter they want), two flunkies enter the diner and whisper something to Fatmann. He nods, then lifts his immense bulk from the stool.

"It seems Ms. Cassidy won't be joining us after all. And unfortunately, the bulls are on their way, so I gotta take a powder. But I'm gonna be watching you boys, and makin' sure you do right by me. I want the package. You find it, Dixie. You find it, or else Frank and Carmine here are gonna take you to the cleaners. Capicce?"

With that he thumps out of the diner, followed by his thugs. They roar off in a pair of automobiles, keep-

20TH CENTURY WEAPONS

Thompson Submachine Gun

The famous "Tommygun" of gangster films, the Thompson submachine gun fires a burst of .45 caliber ammunition, usually from a 50-round drum. The bearer can easily conceal it in a coat or violin case. The Tommygun has become synonymous with urban crime in the early 20th century. Use the Projectile Weapons (Submachine Gun) skill to fire it.

Range: 5/20/50/100

Size: 30 cm long

Mass: 1.6 kg

Energy: 50-round drum, 10-round clip

Damage: 6+4d6

.38 Revolver and .45 Automatic

These hand-held pistols were popular with cops and lowlifes alike. The .38 has a six round cylinder filled with individual shells. The .45 uses a clip of bullets inserted into the handgrip and fired one by one out the barrel. They're fired using the Projectile Weapon (Gunpowder Pistol) skill.

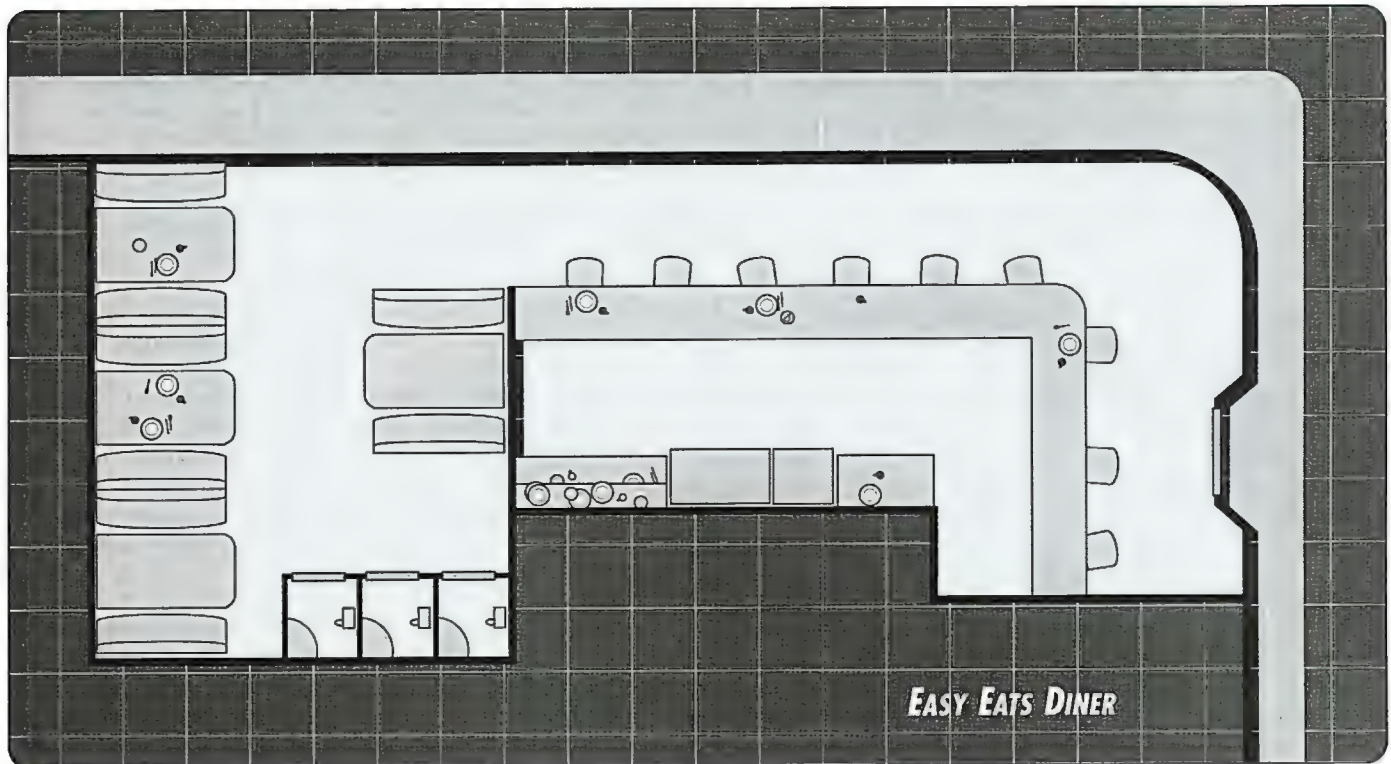
Range: 5/10/25/50

Size: 12 cm, .3 L in volume

Mass: 0.4 kg

Energy: 6 round cylinder (.38), 7 round clip (.45)

Damage: 4+2d6



ing their guns trained on the characters the whole time. As the mobsters pull away, the Crew hears sirens in the distance and shouting nearby.

If they follow the sounds, they discover Annie's dead body a few blocks away. She lies crookedly at the bottom of a loading dock, her neck broken. Apparently she was running from someone when she slipped and fell down a sharp drop. There's nothing the Crew can do for her; the blood's already cooling on the pavement. The shouting comes from a nearby tenement building, where several residents apparently witnessed the poor girl's fall (Fatmann's men fled to avoid identification).

The Crew has time to examine the body for any clues. A cursory search reveals that Annie's lifeless hand clutches a small, crumpled piece of paper. It's the missing page of her diary containing the last two entries:

- K. came to me today. She knows about the affair. Threatened to leave Harry destitute. I think she means it. Offered a way out: I have to steal something from Harry. Statue he's bringing back. Says she'll let us go as long as she has it. Too scared to refuse, but don't know what she wants with it. Isn't she rolling in dough?
- Can't find the statue anywhere. Searched all day. NN mentioned a P.I., but K said no outsiders. Why can't she find this herself?

Below the entries Annie scrawled a single line in her panicked handwriting: "Dixon Hill #117 H." It's not his office number, but the P.O. box in Dixon Hill's office building where she's hidden the Serpent.

Troubleshooting: If the Crewmembers don't find Annie's body, they might learn about the diary page by contacting the police and asking about the murder. The cops want to talk to them anyway since Dix's name is mentioned. A little coercion convinces the police to show them the page, although they must promise to keep the authorities informed of any further developments. Whether or not they honor that promise is up to the Crew.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BLUE DELILAH

The Crew might follow two clues to the Blue Delilah: the phone number found in Annie's room or the thug at Jorge Villa Lobos's. As the headquarters of Nicki the Nose, the Blue Delilah is one of the richest and best-known clubs in the city. Patrons toast each other's success and dance the night away under the subtle watch of Nicki's best-trained men. The fact that the cops raid the place a couple of times a year only seems to heighten its appeal. The guest list is miles long, and only the best and brightest get past the cloakroom. Fortunately Nicki knows Dix, so the P.I. shouldn't have any trouble getting in.

The Nose agrees to meet with the Crewmembers and share what he knows. He holds court in the back of the club, surrounded by his bodyguards and watching the showgirls rehearse. While more polite and respectful than Fatmann, it's clear the two are cut from the same cloth. If he wanted the Serpent badly enough, Nicki would lean on them just as hard. Thankfully he's not so driven; the Serpent—as enticing as it is—doesn't represent the same matter of honor it does for his rival. Nicki would like to have the

NICKI THE NOSE

Role: Antagonist/Possible Ally

Type: Gangster

Backstory: A slightly more prosperous crime lord than his rival, Nicki clawed his way up the criminal ladder after losing his nose at an early age. His prosperity allowed him a certain distorted sense of honor which keeps him from the vicious excesses of Fatmann.

Demeanor: Gruff, no-nonsense. Doesn't suffer fools lightly, but can be civil if the speaker impresses him.

Goal: To keep Fatmann from getting the Serpent. Ideally, to get the Serpent himself.

Costume: Stark pinstriped suit, red tie. An ugly steel nose in place of his real one.

Quote: "You got something to say, or do you just like interrupting me?"

Fitness: 2

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 4

Presence: 3

Willpower +1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Bargain (Bribery) 2 (3), Command (Combat Leadership) 3 (4), First Aid (Human) 1 (2), Intimidation (Torture) 3 (4), Persuasion 2, Projectile Weapon (Pistol) 3 (4), Streetwise (San Francisco Mobs) 3 (4), Vehicle Operation (Automobile) 2 (3)

Traits: Contacts (Many) +3, Favor Owed (Many) +1, Strong Will +2, Rival (Jeremiah Fatmann) -2, Toughness +2

Resistance: 4

Wound Levels: 4/4/4/4/4/0

Serpent, but it's more important to keep Fatmann from acquiring it (that's why he's spent his resources covering the bases—Annie and Villa Lobos—instead of tearing after the statue itself). He tries to convince the Crew to get the object for him, offering "a cut of the action" rather than brandishing threats as Fatmann had.

Nick admits Annie came to see him soon after Harry died, and he agreed to help her in exchange for the Serpent. He put her up in one of the club's small back rooms. She soon grew skittish, however, and vanished after one night; left most of her stuff there, too.

He has since ordered his goons to search for her. The room is small and cramped (it's behind the meat locker), furnished only with a squeaky bed and wash basin. Nick mostly uses it to hide suspects fleeing the authorities. The Crew finds Annie's suitcase here, along with a haphazard assortment of clothes and personal effects. Nicki lets them look around without breathing down their necks, but hovers just outside the room in case they find anything.

The suitcase holds the final clue toward finding the Serpent: the key to the post office box where Annie stored it. She cut a small hole in the suitcase lining and taped the key there, hoping it would be safe. Crewmembers who think to pat down the suitcase feel it beneath the soft inside lining. They discover the key on a Challenging (11) Search Test, or a Routine (5) Search Test if they specifically state they're searching the empty suitcase. The number on the key has been filed off, but Dix recognizes it immediately; it comes from the postal depot just downstairs from his office. All they need now is the key number to match it with the exact postal box.

The Crewmembers have no problem palming the key and hiding in it a pocket—as long as they didn't cause too much audible excitement when they discovered it. To slip the key past Nicki the Crew must convince him they didn't find anything: a Challenging (10) Fast Talk Test, or a Moderate (7) test if the players roleplay the situation well, if the Narrator prefers. Nicki asks them to keep him informed (hinting at untold riches if they do and a hideous punishment if they don't), and lets them go. They now have the biggest piece of the puzzle in their hands.

Troubleshooting: If the Crew misses the key in Annie's suitcase, they've got a problem. Without the key, they don't know where the Serpent is and won't find it. The Narrator might use two options: have Nicki find the key, or plant another clue somewhere else. If Nicki finds the key, he realizes its importance, but won't know what to do with it. He tracks down Dix, shows him the key (which Dix recognizes) and offers to split the money if he can complete the rest of the puzzle. (Once Nicki has the Serpent, of course, he takes sole possession with a shrug and a "sorry, Dix.") Dixon can tell him to buzz off, of course, or feign ignorance, but that raises Nick's suspicions, and he secretly orders a few goons to tail him as Fatmann did. In any case, the Narrator must factor Nicki the Nose in during the adventure's climax below.

An alternative method might be to simply plant the key somewhere else, somewhere the Crew hasn't looked. It should be somewhere Annie's been (the Easy Eats, perhaps,) and hidden in a place not easy to find. Play it by ear, but encourage them to trace Annie's steps after she left Dix's office. If a player comes up with a flash of insight as to its location ("maybe she hid something in the phone booth!"), let them find it. If they're really thick-headed and continue to miss potential hiding places, have Madeline find it among the mail in a letter Annie posted to Dix's office. This is a last-ditch solution; don't use it until they've exhausted every opportunity to find the key on their own.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESOLUTION

Presumably the Crew figures out where Annie hid the Golden Serpent and finds the key to open the P.O. box. Once they have all the clues, they can head to the post office and take possession of the prize when-

ever they wish. Unfortunately, their various adversaries are closing in as well, and it takes some fancy footwork to successfully dodge them.

The climax to the adventure depends a great deal on what's happened before now, and how your particular Crew handled the adventure up to this point. By the time they figure out where the Serpent is, they've doubtless got several groups on their back. Fatmann threatened them if they don't help him, and Nicki the Nose forced himself into the equation as well. Then there's the police, who want the Serpent as evidence and also to return it to the rightful owner, the Mexican government. And don't forget Mrs. Goodwin, whom the Crew probably suspects of murder. The following scene varies depending on how these different elements come together. It also depends on the solutions the Crew devises for the climactic dilemma. Be prepared to play it by ear and anticipate your individual gaming group.

One thing remains certain: Fatmann's watching them, and now believes they're going to lead him to the Serpent. Once they make a move toward the post office, one of the Crewmembers notices a pair of cars following them: cars matching Fatmann's vehicles from the Easy Eats. If they're actually at Dix's office, they notice a group of Fatmann's toughs lurking across the street. It seems Jeremiah is ready to pounce on them the instant they take the Serpent. The Crew must find a way of getting rid of Fatmann before they can get the Serpent—or else let him take it and fail the scenario. Eight of Fatmann's men wait in two cars following them; three have Tommyguns, the rest have .38 or .45 pistols.

The Crew's best option is to call the police before they reach the post office in Dix's building. If appraised of the situation, the cops set up undercover officers at the post office and nail Fatmann when he tries to take the Serpent.

Nicki the Nose can also help, although things turn much more violent if he's there; calling him (or letting him accompany them if he's wise to their game) produces a gaggle of his goons waiting at the post office for Fatmann. A spectacular gunfight follows as the two gangs try to gun each other down, giving the Crewmembers a chance to slip out with the Serpent. A less violent distraction could also work—send one Crewmember to the post office while the rest lead Fatmann on a wild goose chase.

Madeline might help here, too; Fatmann didn't think to put a tail on her, and she can act more or less with impunity. She's even capable of picking locks—as long as she knows the box number Madeline can get to the Serpent without the key. Once she has it, she goes straight to the police. Allow the Crewmembers to try any scheme they wish using their various resources and contacts.

The post office is brightly lit. Although the service window is closed, the numerous mail boxes can be accessed any hour of the day. The boxes are big and painted green, with brass numbers soldered to the front. If the Crewmembers don't have the P.O. box



number from Annie's diary, they might spend two hours trying the key in every box.

If the Crew manages to get the Serpent to the police, they use it to arrest Fatmann. The statue represents a clear motive for killing Harry (and Annie), and Fatmann's desire for it is enough to incriminate him. If the Crew dodged him at the post office, the authorities ask them to help with a sting operation to catch Fatmann trying to take it. The police suggest they call Fatmann and tell him they have the Serpent, then nail him when he comes to collect him. Let the Crew have a final repartee with the gangster as the cops lead him away in cuffs.

At any point during the climax the characters can confront Mrs. Goodwin with the evidence of Annie's diary, proving she orchestrated Harry's murder. With proof against her, she throws herself on the Crew's mercy, telling them how awful Harry was, how he drove her to bankruptcy, how he would have left her at the mercy of the gangsters.

If she's become romantically involved with one of them, she appeals to his tender side, citing their love and asking him not to betray it. Again, allow the characters to handle this however they want, and give them a chance to roleplay the tension-filled encounter with her. If they're thinking straight, they turn her in to the police.

If the Crewmembers played their cards right, the authorities arrest Fatmann and Katherine, and the Serpent returns to the Mexican government. Dix and his friends are cleared of any wrongdoing and have a righteous sense of bringing a murderer to justice. Of course, they won't have the wealth the Serpent could have brought them, but who knows what tomorrow will bring?

She's hard, this city, hard and unbending. Ask Annie Cassidy, or Harry Goodwin; ask any of the others out there lying cold and stiff in the ground. Yeah, she's hard, but she can be beautiful too, even to those who know her. If you treat her right, she might just give you enough to get by. San Francisco smiled on me today, and for once, I was grateful.

END PROGRAM.

SEQUELS

Several elements from this story might find their way into future Dixon Hill plots:

The Curse of the Serpent: An Aztec priest who fell to Cortez's bullets originally carved the Serpent. Upon his death, the priest cursed the Serpent—the curse dooms whoever owns the object to a horrible death. More bodies begin appearing once the Serpent returns to Mexico, and it eventually vanishes from the museum where it was displayed. The Mexican authorities believe it went north again, and hire P.I. Dixon Hill to find it—before the curse claims another victim.

Other Smuggled Artifacts: Harry Goodwin and Jorge Villa Lobos have a long history of smuggling valuable items into the country, and such items make great plot devices. Once the police uncover their scheme, they may want to track down other ill-gotten booty. Who better to help than Dixon Hill? All the items they smuggled sold for a great deal of money, and where there's money there's bound to be trouble. Any number of steamy plots may have sprung up around ancient diamonds, golden idols and other smuggled archaeological treasure.

Revenge: Jeremiah Fatmann doesn't like doing prison time, and intends to punish those responsible. He still has flunkies on the outside, and they won't hesitate to put the hit out on Dix. He and his friends may have to find a way to make peace with him before they end up like Harry. And anything Fatmann can do, Katherine's willing to try as well. Hell hath no fury, after all.

THE DOOM

THAT CAME

TO KORATH

Many regard this famous program of gothic horror by the noted Centauran holoprogrammer Ralla'thain as the finest and most chilling of the genre. Narrators may share Ralla'thain's PADD briefing for prospective participants with interested players to give them some sense of the adventure before them.

PADD BRIEFING

The Doom That Came to Korath is a tale of horror and isolation. Its feeling of dread is best evoked by a single participant, alone against the other forces of the tale's gothic world, with all other parts played by the computer. As with any holonovel, the computer can alter its basic parameters at your whims—if you wish for other participants to play supporting characters such as Roccus and Moren, the mood will likely change from horror to supernatural adventure.

The participant assumes the persona of Korvos, a distant heir to the throne of the mist-shrouded kingdom of Korath. Korvos was raised in a sunny and peaceful neighboring land, where he still resides as the action of the story opens. When he is unexpectedly called upon to assume Korath's throne, he returns for the first time to his haunted homeland, where he falls in love with a mysterious, veiled woman. Meanwhile, someone or something murders all who try to help him. To destroy the force of evil that hangs over his land, Korvos must learn the secrets of his ancestors and understand the role his new love plays in them.

This story takes place in a pair of neighboring kingdoms on Alpha Centauri during the period of history called the Pre-Evanesence. For those unfamiliar with Centauran history, here are the distinguishing social, cultural and technological developments of the Pre-Evanesence:

- In the eastern part of the continent of Vældæs, where this story takes place, authoritarian rule by kings, supported by nobles, remains the main form of government.
- Most people are ruled by superstition and guided in their spiritual affairs by a caste of priests supported by the kings. A few educated scholars discovered a new ideology called rationalism, which will soon lead to a scientific and technological revolution.
- The stirrup has been developed, but gunpowder and firearms are several centuries away. The fastest mode of transportation is the horse-drawn carriage.

As the story opens, the sunny, peaceable kingdom of Elberath is ruled by the enlightened monarch Marwand, who encourages his young nobles to study rationalism, so long as it doesn't go too far. The people revere Marwand; he supports the arts and sciences.

A king named Oacan rules the stormy, troubled kingdom of Korath, where priests treat rationalism as heresy and nobles oppress the peasantry.

NOTES FOR THE NARRATOR

The persona descriptions provide goals in case other Crewmembers wish to play the roles of supporting characters or antagonists. They may not play the monster. This holonovel changes considerably with

GENRE TEMPLATE: GOTHIC HORROR STORY

Examples: Movies: *Dracula*, *In the Mouth of Madness*. Plays: *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare.

Imagery: Dark, rainy countrysides covered in sickly vegetation and twisted trees. Gloomy, cold castles riddled with secret passageways and filled with scheming nobles and priests. Hideous monstrosities, torture chambers, dead bodies.

Themes: Defeating a great evil infecting the land. Overcoming a curse, no matter who's involved with it.

Stock Characters:

The Doomed Hero: Innocent to the evil around him, he slowly descends into the plot of treachery, betrayal and unimaginable horror. He must deal with mysterious and terrifying events surrounding him—inexplicable deaths, plotting behind his back, unknown sounds and frightening dreams—sometimes unknowingly instigating them himself. He slowly learns he is the key to solving the mystery and ridding those around him of the evil infesting everything.

Quote: "We must clear the melancholy hovering over the kingdom, but I was unaware a curse caused this bleak mood."

The Sidekick: A friend to the Doomed Hero who accompanies him while investigating the horrific events surrounding him and offers a different perspective on the problem. His view on life and the supernatural are quite opposite the hero's, but he still stands by his side, especially when faced with danger.

Quote: "Curses and monsters belong to the realm of dreams, my friend. Such things don't truly haunt the real world."

The Mysterious Woman: This female character seems at times little more than a fleeting apparition of gentleness and beauty whom the hero strives to meet and understand. She might possibly be the hero's love interest or a means to ensnare him into the greater, more sinister plot. Her appearances often bring strange occurrences, clues or warnings. Those opposing the hero might use her to lure him into a trap.

Quote: "You must leave this place at once, my dear, before darkness envelopes us all."

The Wizenad Ally: A revered and knowledgeable ally joins the hero, counseling him in his endeavors to destroy the evil opposing him. This ally, however, also keeps secrets, both helpful and harmful, from the hero, as part of his own means of saving him.

This ally earns the hero's confidence, but may also work with the forces of evil, or fall under their control.

Quote: "Be careful, young one, for though you walk along what seems a clear path, you may fall into traps you cannot see nor understand."

The Forces of Evil: Those opposing the hero take both physical and supernatural form. Those bound to the real world live by their twisted motivations, often inspired by otherworldly entities with deeper plans. They play the hero's natural enemies. The supernatural forces range from monsters and ghosts to voices and evil spirits. These forces often seek to recruit the hero to their cause, tempting or threatening him to do their bidding.

Quote: "Join us, share in our power, and together we can rule the land. Or we will destroy you."

Plot Devices: A cursed inheritance, missing relative, mysterious prophesy or plea for help might draw the hero into the clutches of evil.

more than one non-computer persona in play. Use the synopsis as a model for what the characters might try to do rather than a strict blueprint the plot must follow.

The synopsis shows what happens if only Korvos participates and does everything right. Failures generally lead to the deaths of all sympathetic characters, and eventually Korvos, in the clutches of a fearsome creature.

THE MAIN CHARACTERS

CREWMEMBER PERSONAE

Ralla'thain designed this holonovel for one or two active participants amidst the other holographic personalities. One player should assume the principle role of Korvos, heir to the kingdom of Korath. A second player may join as his faithful companion, Raciis. Although Morea might seem suitable for another player, her role becomes complicated and is best left up to the Narrator to play.

KORVOS

Role: Protagonist

Type: Romantic hero

Backstory: Youngest of three sons of Oacan, King of Korath, Korvos was sent as a boy to live as a hostage in the court of King Marwand, ruler of the neighboring nation of Ælberoth. His exile was part of a peace settlement Korvos' grandfather and namesake—Korvos I (known as Korvos the Swift to his admirers, and Korvos the Rash to his detractors)—signed after instigating a senseless war which devastated the entire region. When Marwand and his allies finally defeated him, the oracles of Ælberoth advised that young Korvos II, then two years old, should be raised far from his homeland. He has not returned since.

Korvos II is now 22 years old, and thinks of himself as Ælberothian. He had always assumed one of his older brothers would succeed his birth father and ascend to the Korathian throne. He regards Marwand as his surrogate father, and Marwand's son Theguis as his own brother.

Demeanor: Brave, forthright, energetic.

Goal: End the curse on Korath with Morea still alive for complete victory. He wins partial victory if he ends the curse without Morea surviving.

Costume: Before he is crowned king, Korvos wears the dress uniform of a cavalry officer of the Kingdom of Ælberoth: bright red tunic, riding boots, high white helmet with a feathered plume. After the coronation, he dons the dark-colored, fur-trimmed robes of a Korathian monarch.

RACIUS**Role:** Protagonist's Sidekick**Type:** Voice of reason**Backstory:** A nobleman and officer in the elite cavalry detachment of the Ælberothian army, Racijs is friend and confidant to Prince Theguis. Racijs is on polite terms with Theguis' other best friend, Korvos of Korath, although the fellow is rather gloomy and not the sort he'd choose to carouse with. He has never been to Korath.**Demeanor:** Military posture, dashing profile, outgoing manner. A dyed-in-the-wool rationalist, he's often reading a scientific journal or surveying the landscape with his spyglass.**Goal:** A participant playing Racijs wins if Korvos achieves his goal, even if Racijs himself is slain by Ionus or the creature.**Costume:** Racijs wears the dress uniform of a cavalry officer of the Kingdom of Ælberoth: bright red tunic, riding boots, high white helmet with a feathered plume.**SUPPORTING CAST**

Each participant in this vast conspiracy has his or her own agendas relating to the curse of Korath. While their motives remain cloaked in mystery, their actions help push Korvos toward his destiny.

MOREA

Daughter of Ionus who mysteriously haunts Korvos. He initially notices her as a beautiful, veiled woman at his coronation, but quickly realizes she plays an integral role in the curse surrounding his family. A delicate flower among the dreary atmosphere of the fortress, she tries warning Korvos of the curse and eventually becomes a victim of it, all to lure the young heir to his destiny.

ELMUTH

The highest priest in Korath and traditional friend to its king. He advises Korvos on many matters, tutoring him in courtly protocol and striking a balance between the kingdom's new ruler and its restless nobles. Although he knows the curse's true potential, and realizes Morea plays some role in its fulfillment, Elmuth desperately tries to keep Korvos ignorant of the curse, hoping the young heir might bring relief to Korath through his own strength of character.

IONUS

Father of Morea and one of the chief noblemen of Korath, he speaks for the corrupt upper classes who want Korvos to bring war against the kingdom's neighbors. The nobles feel such a conflict would increase their influence, lands and wealth, especially since they've drained the peasantry of all its capable of pro-

viding. Ionus believes the curse can return prosperity to Korath, and takes whatever steps necessary to ensure Korvos does not try preventing his destiny. The evil spirits haunting the kingdom hold Ionus in their sway, whether or not he truly realizes it.

HUNÇEK AND THE BRIGANDS

This band of wandering rogues often waylays unwary travelers, including heirs of Korath heading for their coronation. Nobles often hire them to anonymously enforce their oppressive edicts against the peasantry, or to further their own plans against their rivals. After his failed ambush against Korvos, Hunçek finds employment with the priest Elmuth, who hires him to assassinate Morea in a desperate attempt to prevent the curse.

It Begins...

King Marwand of Ælberoth has raised the captive prince Korvos almost as his own son, teaching him the enlightened ways of his court. Young Korvos learns his birth father, Oacan, king of the neighboring kingdom of Korath, has been killed. Contrary to all expectations, Korvos must ascend the throne of Korath; he



must return to his homeland immediately. Korath's reputation as a dangerous place leads Marwand to order one of his young officers, the dashing Raci-
us, to accompany Korvos.

The two of them travel to Korath Castle. Elmuth, priest and advisor to the realm's kings, greets Korvos. Prior to his coronation, grumbling nobles led by Ionus demand a return to the martial values espoused by his grandfather—they want him to launch an attack on Ælberoth. As the ceremony begins, a wretched peasant, Ganiri, breaks through the ranks of nobles to plead his case to Korvos—he must end the curse that starves the beleaguered farmers. During the ceremony, Korvos' eyes settle on a young woman of the court. Unlike all others around her, she is veiled from head to foot. He is powerfully intrigued by this mysterious vision in lace.

At night, the veiled woman appears in his bedchambers and begs him to leave the kingdom. She reveals herself as Morea, beautiful daughter of Ionus. A witch's prophecy foretold that Korvos' ancestral curse would destroy her.

Elsewhere in the castle, a shambling creature attacks Raci-
us. He fights it off and seeks out Korvos; they follow the thing's tracks. The trail leads to a peasant cottage. They find Ganiri slain within. Korvos realizes he was killed by human hands, and, when he confronts Ionus and his allies, comes to suspect a member of the noble's entourage. As if acting on its own, Korvos' sword arm unsheathes his rapier and runs the man through.

Korvos goes to see Morea, averting an assassination attempt against her. Clues on the scene lead him to accuse the priest, Elmuth. He coerces an explanation from Elmuth, learning the history of the family curse.

The monster slays Elmuth. Korvos continues pursuing the beast. Blood-crazed nobles, led by Ionus, interrupt his search and demand war. Raci-
us dies and the creature seizes Morea. To rescue her and kill the creature, Korvos must make a crucial deduction and make a great self-sacrifice.

CHAPTER ONE: KING OF KORATH

The holodeck shows the sun-drenched court of King Marwand of Ælberoth. The Crewmembers enter a courtyard in a limestone villa, with a pond, rock gardens filled with lush, well-tended plants, and gleaming marble tiles. Brightly-colored cotton banners, in red, yellow, and orange, hang from balcony ringing the courtyard.

The program begins when the Crewmember playing Korvos sits down in front of a wooden *taymarim*, an old Centauran instrument—a cross between a harpsichord and a zither. He “becomes” Korvos and the action begins. The computer changes the appearance of the character's hands so they appear thick and muscular; a large white scar sits just to the right of the knuckle of the little finger on the right hand. A stormily passionate sonata blares from the *taymarim*,

RACIUS

This adventure assumes one of the Crewmembers play the part of Raci-
us. If this is not the case, and Raci-
us is portrayed as a holo-
graphic character, he has the following attributes and skills:

Fitness: 3

Coordination: 3

Intellect: 2

Logic +1

Perception -1

Presence: 2

Willpower +1

Empathy -1

Psi: 0

Suggested Skills: Animal Handling (Horse) 2 (3), Command (Cavalry Officer) 2 (3), Persuasion (Debate) 1 (2), Primitive Weaponry (Rapier) 3 (4)

Special Skills: Courtly Manners (Gossip) 2 (3), Hunting (Bear) 2 (3), Philosophy (Rationalism) 2 (3)

Resistance: 3

Wound Levels: 3/3/3/3/3/0

whether Korvos plays or not (courtesy of the holoprogram); Korvos should get into the act by pretending to pound the keys.

Korvos sits alone in the shade. A group of elegantly attired nobles sits on a dais at the courtyard's other end. The character recognizes many of them from the documentation he studied before running the program. On the tallest chair perches King Marwand, a trim, elderly gentleman sporting a monocle and snow-white handlebar mustache. He wears a finely tailored suit in the height of Pre-Evanescence style. Next to him is his wife, Queen Rebara. These are Korvos' surrogate parents; they listen proudly to his performance. Also listening are a coterie of enraptured young ladies from the finest families of Ælberoth.

A BREACH OF ETIQUETTE

Noise interrupts the recital. Korvos can try to compete with the noise through virtuosity at the *taymarim*. Make a Moderate (6) Intellect Test: +2 if Crewmember has Artistic Expression (any musical instrument), +5 in the unlikely event the Crewmember has Artistic Expression (*Taymarim*). If he succeeds, not only the audience but the folks making the noise stop to listen in awe of the fabulous display of musicianship.

The noisy interlopers comprise a hunting party that soon enters the courtyard. From the PADD reading, the Crewmember playing Korvos recognizes his surrogate brother, Theguis, accompanied by his boisterous friends. Most of the young ladies eye Theguis and his band, forgetting Korvos. Rebara scolds the hunters for interrupting Korvos' recital. Theguis seems

apologetic. Another of them rolls his eyes—participants recognize this strapping, handsome fellow from the PADD briefing: Raciuss. Theguis indicates his friends should take seats and listen. The king asks Korvos to recommence playing at the top of the second movement. When Korvos returns to the keyboard, the *taymarim* resumes playing.

MESSAGE FROM KORATH

Korvos no sooner continues the sonata when a messenger appears with urgent news for the king. Marwand reads the message and appears troubled. He signals Korvos to stop playing and approach. He asks the young ladies and men—other than Theguis and Raciuss—to leave so he may speak to Korvos about an urgent matter.

The message is from Elmuth, high priest to the royal family of Korath. Korvos must journey to Korath immediately, to accept the king's crown. His father, Oacan, and his two older brothers were killed in a rockfall while boar-hunting.

Theguis is upset. Everybody knows the kings of Korath are cursed—the death of Korvos' kin proves that. Korvos must stay in Ælberoth where it's safe, he counsels.

Marwand disagrees. Korath's land is poor, its nobles always advocating war so they can enrich their holdings. If Korvos abdicates his ancestral claim to the throne, one of these battle-hungry barons could seize power, and war might once more break out between the two nations. Korvos, having been raised far from Korath's ghosts, may be immune to the curse. Perhaps he can even lift it.

Theguis demands to accompany Korvos back to Korath. Again, Marwand refuses; he cannot risk his own heir. Instead, he sends Raciuss.

Allow Korvos to inject his own comments while roleplaying this debate. If another player is running Raciuss, make sure he voices his opinions, too, when invited by Marwand and Theguis.

Korvos can try to make an impressive speech to thank Marwand by making a Routine (4) Empathy or Persuasion (Oratory) Test. If successful, and Raciuss is run by the computer, Raciuss takes such inspiration from Korvos' noble words that he gains a +1 bonus to all tests for the rest of the holonovel.

There is little time to pack. The carriage from Korath is waiting: an oversized, cinder-black carriage pulled by a team of fiery-eyed horses.

CHAPTER TWO: DARK JOURNEY

THE COACHMAN

As Marwand's servants load their bags on top of the huge black coach, Cilea, the coachman, bows before them. He wears a towering stovepipe hat and servant's livery in funereal colors. He's a squat, frog-faced man topped by a ragged mop of ash-white hair. He staggers upward, awkwardly recovering from his



bow. In promising to get them safely to Korath, his wide mouth gapes open to reveal a graveyard of ruined teeth: "Unless the wolves are out, of course. Then I make no promises."

THE ROAD

As it makes its way from Ælberoth's capital to the Korathian border, the coach traverses a green and pastoral valley. The peasants seem prosperous and well-fed. The weather is warm and dry.

Korath's border contrasts sharply with Ælberoth's fertile land. Suddenly the terrain becomes mountainous and the sky turns overcast. A damp chill pervades the air. The roads get worse, cut with ruts, gullies and ditches; Korvos and Raciuss jostle around inside the coach. A fierce and cutting wind springs up, carrying with it the sound of howling wolves.

If Raciuss is computer-run: Raciuss works to conceal his unease as the coach rattles through the dark Korathian night. He struggles against the windy gusts in an effort to light his pipe. "Listen, old man, I ought to be frank with you," he says to Korvos. Raciuss explains it's no secret he never really warmed to Korvos. He seemed too deucedly mournful all the time. But now that he's seen Korvos' homeland, Raciuss begins to see why he might justly lay claim to

a melancholy disposition. Still, bad weather, mountainous terrain and wolves are all natural phenomena. Perhaps he can serve Korvos better by countering the superstitions that no doubt grip the backwards people of this godforsaken land. Racius also promises to stick by Korvos' side through thick and thin. His king ordered him to help, and help he shall. Such is his duty.

THE GIBBET

Slowing to negotiate a muddy patch of road, the coach passes a gibbet from which hangs a pair of wrought-iron cages just large enough for a man to stand. Each contains a well-preserved corpse. Perhaps due to a trick of the light—a storm has come up and now blasts of sheet lightning bathe the hills in sharp, white flashes—the corpses' eyes seem to meet those of the coach passengers and follow them as they pass.

The coachman Cilea must be pressured into talking about this—he's superstitious and doesn't like to talk about such things. A Routine (5) Presence, Intimidation, Command, Persuasion or Charm Test induces Cilea to explain. These are the Potock brothers, notorious bandits Korvos' father captured and sentenced to die of exposure for their crimes. They stopped rotting after a few days and remained up there for five years now. Every so often, when the moon is full, they climb down to terrorize the countryside. The authorities have tried a dozen ways to dispose of the bodies, but they always find their way back to those cages.

Korvos and Racius can stop, if they want, to try to get rid of the dread Potock brothers. This encounter helps establish the dreary mood, so what they do here has no effect on the main story.

BANDITS

A little later the coach stops before a tree fallen across the road. Bandits appear from their hiding places to ambush the travelers. They intend to loot the bags on top of the coach and hold the nobles for ransom. They're armed only with cudgels, but there are five of them. The lead bandit, who does all the talking, is an insolent lout named Hunçek (Cilea knows of his fearsome reputation).

Korvos can deal with the bandits in one of two ways:

Fight them: The bandits flee if more than two of them are knocked out or otherwise incapacitated. If there is a fight and the computer runs Racius, try showing him as heroic and self-sacrificing. Perhaps he interposes himself between Korvos and a cudgel, or takes on more than his share of combatants.

Korvos identifies himself: If Korvos acts like a terrifying king of legend, or shows the scar on his hand (even unintentionally), the bandits turn pale, shake at the knees, gabble something about begging forgiveness, and run into the woods. For this to work, Korvos must make a Moderate (7) Presence, Intimidation or Command Test.

HUNÇEK AND THE BRIGANDS

Role: Sinister Henchmen

Type: Cowardly brigands

Backstory: Hunçek and his band of thieves roam the Korath countryside preying on weak travelers and enforcing the will of nobles who hire them. They're not terribly brave, and only attack when the odds are favorable and the prize substantial.

Demeanor: Thin, quick, often concealed in the shadows. They rarely speak with others outside their band.

Goal: Waylay Korvos on his way to Korath castle, and assassinate Morea for Elmuth.

Costume: Threadbare, dark tunics, boots, hooded cloaks.

Fitness: 2

Strength +1

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 1

Logic -1

Presence: 1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Gaming (Throw the Bones) 1 (2), Intimidation (Bluster) 1 (2), Primitive Weaponry (Cudgel OR Knife) 1 (2)

Resistance: 2

Wound Levels: 2/2/2/2/2/0

Troubleshooting: The bandits might successfully overcome Korvos and Racius. They want to capture, not kill, these valuable prisoners. After several embarrassing days imprisoned in a miserable little hut, a force of constables led by Ionus bursts in, rescue Korvos, and summarily executes the bandits who survive the initial onslaught. In later encounters, Ionus never fails to remind Korvos he saved his life.

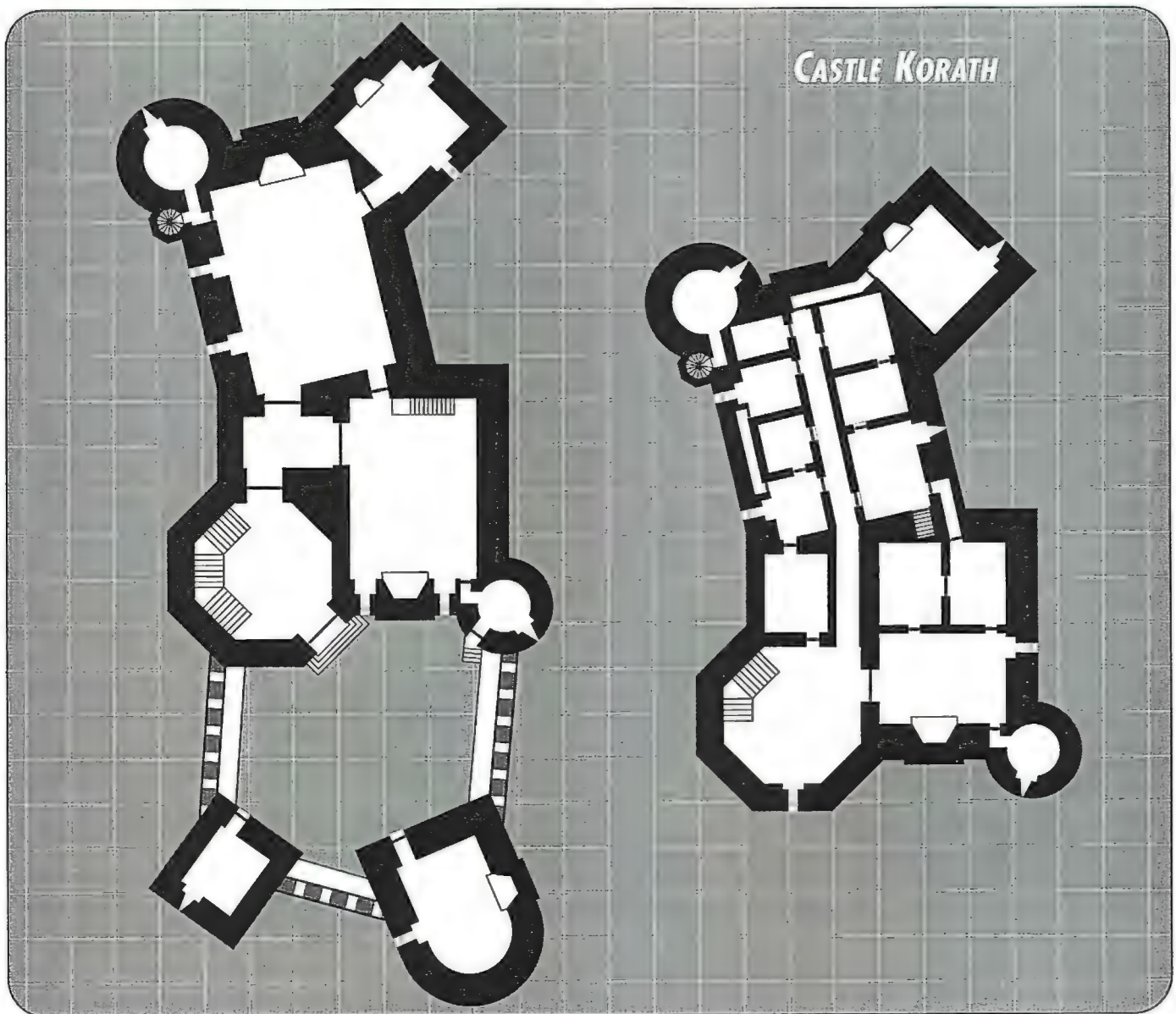
CHAPTER THREE: THE CASTLE

THE WELCOME

Soon the coach nears Castle Korath, a monumental edifice of ink-black stone bristling with turrets and battlements. It juts out over the surrounding countryside atop a massive outcrop of jagged rocks. As the carriage approaches the gatehouse through the pounding rain, bursts of lightning periodically illuminate the dark fortress.

Cilea drives the coach up to the castle gates and the rusty iron portcullis several stories high blocking the way. Guards in the tower wave their acknowledgment. The portcullis screams in metallic protest as they raise it so the coach can pass through.

They find the mournful figure of Elmuth waiting in the rain-slicked courtyard. The gloomy priest greets Korvos, bidding him to come inside where it's warm and dry.



The main hall of the castle is neither warm nor dry. The rooms within the fortress are large, drafty, damp and cold. Everything inside looks old and worn. Molds and lichens grow on exposed wooden beams, beneath the furniture and in dark corners. Centipedes and spiders skitter down the walls. Mosquitoes infest the place.

Elmuth introduces himself and tells Korvos the people are deep in mourning for his father and brothers. If asked about the funeral arrangements, Elmuth claims the burial was already performed in accordance with local custom. Should Korvos exhume his father's body from the royal crypt, he finds the sepulcher empty. The bodies of all the previous kings of Korvos' lineage are likewise absent. The creature stalking the castle corridors claimed King Oacan's body as part of its substance, so the body was never recovered.

Elmuth answers any questions Korvos might ask—he hopes to protect Korvos from the curse by keeping

him in the dark about it, so his answers often seem evasive. If Korvos makes a Moderate (6) Empathy or Medical Sciences (Psychology) Test, he realizes Elmuth's answers hold something back. If confronted with this suspicion, Elmuth confesses he's worried about the curse, which just claimed three members of Korvos' family. He doesn't reveal anything more than that.

He informs Korvos he intends to crown the new king in a coronation ceremony scheduled for the next day. Elmuth believes the people and the kingdom need strong leadership—any delay could create greater hardships for the realm.

Almost as an afterthought, the priest asks about Racius. Elmuth suggests a hearty young noble of cheerful Ælberoth would unlikely enjoy an extended stay at Castle Korath. If Racius is computer-run, he takes offense at this and complains the Korathian welcome is much chillier than Ælberothian hospitality

would allow. To prevent an unpleasant confrontation, Korvos must smooth things over with a Moderate (7) Empathy, Charm or Persuasion Test. If he fails, Elmuth takes offense; Korvos and Racius suffer -2 penalties in all future interaction-related tests to earn Elmuth's cooperation.

Servants with stooped postures and fungal complexions appear at Elmuth's hand-clap to conduct the young men to their quarters. Korvos and Racius enter their dreary suites, decorated with gloomy paintings and ancient wooden furniture intricately carved with geometric designs. When out of Elmuth's presence, Racius gives voice to his offense at the old priest's comments about him. He agrees, however, that the castle is not the most congenial lodging he's ever enjoyed.

Typically, the holodeck advances to the next important scene. When Korvos and Racius lay down on their beds, the computer fast forwards time to the next morning. Barring this, the computer assumes the players want to continue roleplaying, soaking up the castle's gothic atmosphere, and continues to maintain the bedchamber set. Ordinarily, players choose this point to stop the program and return to their duties,

ELMUTH

Role: Keeper of Secrets

Type: Scary priest

Backstory: Elmuth was advisor to Korvos the Swift, to his son Oacan, and aims to protect young Korvos from the ancestral horrors that haunt the kings of Korath.

Demeanor: Tall, taciturn, forbidding. Looms over others like a ruined tower. Speaks in low, ominous tones. Moves very little. His face is crisscrossed with the wrinkles of advanced age.

Goal: Guard Korvos from the curse and keep him alive, even if it means arranging Morea's death without arousing suspicion of himself.

Costume: A long, brown robe of coarse and worn fabric, with a piece of rope for a belt. He wears a dusty, moth-eaten fur cap with a high peak that seemingly increases his height.

Fitness: 1

Coordination: 1

Intellect: 3

Presence: 3

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Administration (Feudal Kingdom) 2 (5), Command (Priestly Authority) 2 (3), Diplomacy (Regional Affairs) 1 (2), History (Korath) 3 (4), Law (Korathian) 1 (3), Persuasion (Oratory) 2 (3)

Special Skills: Conspiracy (Cajole Minions) 2 (3), Theology (Ælberothian) 2 (3)

Resistance: 1

Wound Levels: 1/1/1/1/1/0

IONUS

Role: Sinister Pot-Stirrer

Type: Hard-hearted noble

Backstory: Ionus, lord of an ancient estate, knows a curse haunts the land. A force of evil expects the kings of Korath to shed blood in its name. If Korath does not go to war with its neighbors, the force feeds on the people of Korath. Right now it's just eating sheep and peasants, but it soon turns its murderous wrath on the nobility. Because she is the very image of Bloody Queen Besaria, Ionus' daughter, Morea, is bound to be an early victim of the curse-unless the evil is sated with the blood of foreigners.

Demeanor: Bearded, portly, gruff. Has a hectoring manner. Blusters when denied what he wants. Constantly clenching his fists.

Goal: Silence Ganiri, kill Korath and wage war against Ælberoth.

Costume: Elaborately jeweled robes which are, on inspection, rather worn.

Fitness: 2

Strength: +1

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 2

Presence: 2

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Administration (Feudal Fief) 2 (3), Command (Noble Authority) 2 (3), Intimidation (Bluster) 2 (4), Primitive Weaponry (Rapier) 3 (4), Unarmed Combat (Boxing) 2 (3)

Special Skills: Hunting (Boar) 2 (3), Inspire Loyalty (Thugs and Bullies) 1 (3)

Traits: Argumentative -1, Arrogant -1, Greedy -1, Vengeful -1

Resistance: 2

Wound Levels: 2/2/2/2/2/0

then pick up the action at the next scene. Otherwise, a few minutes after "retiring for the night" holographic servants enter both rooms to waken and dress Korvos and Racius.

CHAPTER FOUR: RATTLING SABERS

Just before the coronation Elmuth arranges for Korvos to meet the heads of the noble families of Korath, now gathered in an antechamber near the great hall for the coronation. Elmuth tells him a new king needs their support to secure his throne and effectively rule the land. He must strike a compromising peace among them, for some would like nothing better for the lineage to die out, so they can rule.

The nobles are a motley lot. As they approach, Racius notes under his breath that they look more like brigands and warlords than the erudite military officers of Ælberoth.

Their spokesman, Ionus, welcomes Korvos, claiming they look forward to his long and victorious reign. Looking meaningfully at Racius, he requests a private

word. Ionus wants Korvos to begin a military campaign against one of Korath's neighbors as soon as possible. The harvests have been poor and are getting worse. The only way the nobles can maintain order, prevent starvation and rally the peasants' spirits is through conquest and the spoils of battle. Though Ionus doesn't admit this, the nobles also want to fill their dwindling treasuries.

From the PADD briefing, Korvos should know Ælberoth signed mutual defense treaties with all of Korath's neighbors; to attack any of them would instigate a war with Marwand. Should he share this information with Raciis, his companion also reminds Korvos about these treaties.

Korvos must graciously refuse Ionus without antagonizing him. He must successfully oppose an appropriate interaction skill, such as his Command (Regal Authority) or Persuasion (Oratory) against Ionus' Intimidation (Veiled Threats). If he fails, add the difference in results to all Difficulties for future interactions with the nobles of Korath.

Ionus also suggests Korvos get rid of that foreign popinjay who's always hovering around him. Some disloyal sorts are already suggesting Korvos cares more about Ælberoth than Korath. No one likes a foreign adviser.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE OLD PEASANT

Nobles and their families begin taking their places for the coronation. Elmuth's assistant priests lower ceremonial robes onto his ruined frame. When Korvos enters the grand hall, everyone waits expectantly for him to move to the dais where he will be crowned.

Commotion suddenly disturbs the crowd. An old man dressed in rags makes his way through the assembled onlookers. They recoil from him as if he bears a contagious disease. Elmuth spots him and orders guards to subdue him. The peasant evades them and throws himself at the young monarch's feet.

The peasant Ganiri begs the king to listen to him. He apologizes for disturbing such an important occasion, but he claims he has no time to wait for an audience. The people starve, he cries. The curse brought so much rain that nothing can be planted. Seed just rots in the ground. These conditions have plagued the land for several years, and the hardship become worse every day. Yet the noble landowners give them no relief. They insist on collecting taxes the peasants can't pay. If they don't pay, the nobles burn their hovels and subject their daughters to a fate worse than death. Those serfs who haven't already lost their homes fear losing them.

Ionus steps forward, broadsword in hand, offering to dispose of this lying rebel. He says some foreign power obviously paid this man to embarrass Korvos at his coronation. Despite his boldness, Ionus withdraws if Korvos orders him to.

Elmuth comes forward, grabs the peasant and demands to know how he got into the castle. "No one passes through those gates without my permission!"

GANIRI

Role: First of the Doomed

Type: Beleaguered peasant

Backstory: Ganiri and the other peasants are starving. Everybody knows the curse is to blame. The peasants are poor and getting poorer. Ionus, the lord whose land Ganiri works, demands his tribute no matter what, beating those who defy him.

Demeanor: Cowed by his social superiors but determined to have his say. His nervousness makes him seem bold. He is middle-aged and speaks in a rustic manner.

Goal: Bringing his grievances against the nobles' oppression and the curse before Korvos.

Costume: Threadbare peasant garb.

Fitness: 2

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 2

Presence: 2

Willpower: +1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Persuasion (Oratory) 1 (2)

Special Skills: Farming (Shepherd) 1 (2)

Resistance: 2

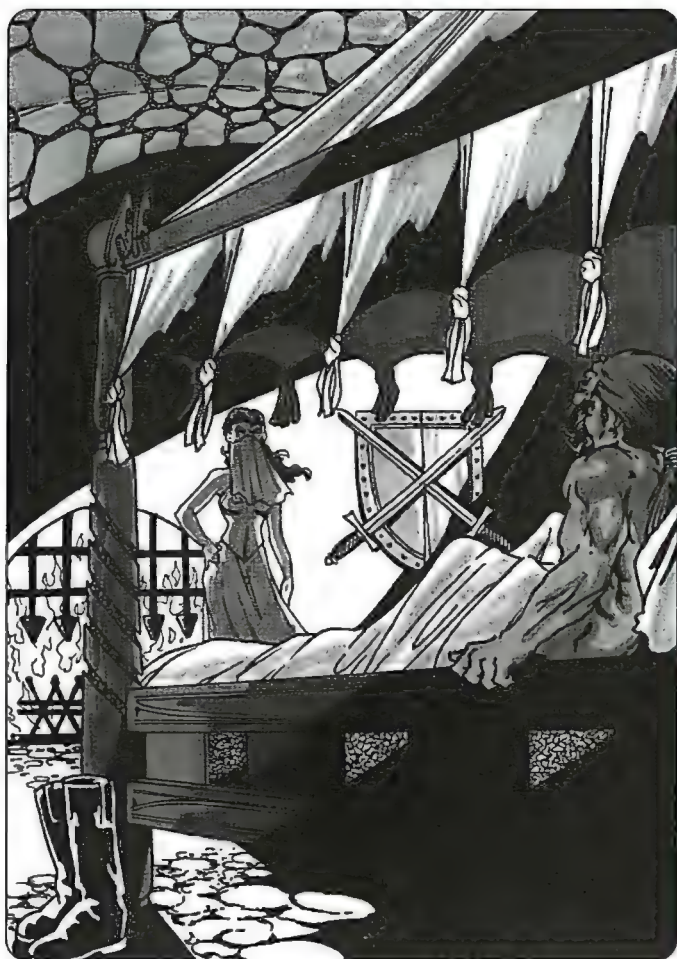
Wound Levels: 2/2/2/2/2/0

Ganiri confesses he was hired to cart in firewood for the extra ovens cooking the coronation feast. A Moderate (7) Empathy, Command, Charm, or Persuasion Test calms Elmuth's wrath, helps him regain his dignity, and induces him to release Ganiri. The character successfully making the test gains a +1 bonus in all future interactions with Elmuth.

The man's fate is in Korvos' hands. If he punishes Ganiri, subtract 1 from the Difficulties of all future interaction Tests with Ionus, Elmuth and the nobles. If he shows mercy, the assembled aristocrats demonstrate visible surprise. A Challenging (9) Presence, Command, Charm or Persuasion Test convinces the nobles to accept this; otherwise they make unpleasant murmuring noises during the coronation, and he suffers a -1 penalty in all future interactions with nobles. If he succeeds, he gets a +1 bonus in all such interactions.

CHAPTER SIX: THE VEIL

The coronation proceeds. As Elmuth recites the ancient Centauran litanies that accompany the crowning of a king, Korvos notices one woman stands out among all the royal entourage nearby. She is an apparition in a white, gauzy dress, her face concealed by a veil. She's late entering the hall. Her veil is backlit by a torch as she passes it; for an instant, the veil looks like a fluttering halo. Self-consciously she



moves across the hall and joins Ionus' party. Ionus is already standing arm-in-arm with a woman his age, so this vision can't be his wife. Who is it? This veiled beauty should attract the player's attention, as she stands out from the rest of the crowd. The gauze covering her face makes it hard to penetrate the veil and discover the enchanting eyes it hides. Is she smiling at him? And why does she appear so interested in Korvos? Korvos should slowly gain a sense that whoever hides beneath the veil is only woman in the world he can ever love. Without knowing it, he has been waiting his whole life to meet her.

While Korvos floats under the influence of this lovely woman, Elmuth crowns him and the crowds cheer. The priest notices Korvos looking at the veiled woman. A look of profound concern passes like a cloud over his features (though Korvos might be too enraptured to see this).

When the ceremony ends, the young woman disappears among the crowd. If asked, Elmuth pretends not to have seen her or know her identity. Ionus claims she is a poor cousin from the back country, disfigured by the pox. She thought she was healthy enough to attend the ceremony, but became weak and was taken back home.

Korvos can't elicit a truthful answer from anyone concerning the girl. If he assigns Raciuss to ask around

during the reception, he ferrets out the truth: she is Ionus' daughter, Morea. She's worn the veil since Oacan's death—no one knows why. If Raciuss is a player persona, he must earn this clue with a Moderate (7) Test of an appropriate interaction skill and an entertaining dose of roleplaying.

Troubleshooting: During this scene, the Narrator must enchant Korvos with this mysterious woman. The player must become enthralled by her hidden identity and yearn to know more about her. Romance and love aren't easy to instill in a roleplaying game, but Narrators can entice the player running Korvos with the mystery behind her identity and her ethereal beauty.

Offer hints that this woman seems interested in Korvos. She might seem to smile behind the veil, or

MOREA

Role: Protagonist's Love Interest

Type: Romantic heroine

Backstory: Morea is the daughter of an ancient Korathian noble family. Her maternal great-great-aunt was queen to Korvos' grandfather; known as Bloody Besaria, she encouraged Korvos the Swift in his ill-considered wars against his neighbors. Morea knows she is the spitting image of this ancestral relation. A witch woman once said Morea was the reincarnation of Besaria, and would bring similar misery to herself and to the kingdom. Her father, Ionus, pledged to protect her from this fate.

Demeanor: Embodies the virtues (and limitations) of Victorian-era womanhood—she speaks in high-flown language, allows her emotions to sweep her away herself, and faints when excited.

Goal: Romantically distract Korvos and warn him of her possible role in the curse.

Costume: Morea wears a different gloriously detailed and layered frock each time she appears; these are beautiful but muted in color—the browns of a freshly dug grave and the grays of a sky pregnant with thunder.

Fitness: 2

Vitality: -1

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 2

Logic: -1

Perception: +1

Presence: 2

Willpower: -1

Empathy: +1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Artistic Expression (Needlepoint) 3 (4), Charm (Influence) 2 (3), Persuasion (Pious Exclamations) 2 (3)

Traits: Weakness -2

Resistance: 1

Wound Levels: 1/1/1/1/1/0

maybe she gazes intently at him—craning her neck to get a better view—throughout the coronation ceremony.

Despite the need to build an attraction between Korvos and Morea, do not allow them to meet until the next scene. The coronation ceremonies might keep Korvos busy among honor guards, receiving lines and throngs of nobles.

CHAPTER SEVEN: NIGHT VISITATION

After the coronation, there is an officious banquet in Korvos' honor, which Narrators can run for a bit of side-play (aficionados recommend the grilled Centauran *Jalala*). Afterwards, there is little else for Korvos and Racius to do but retire to their bedchambers. Servants prepare Korvos for bed, and the computer waits for the Crewmember to turn in after the day's exhaustive activities.

While the player lies on the thick feather mattress, a voice comes to him in his sleep, a low whisper: "Join us." He wakes in a cold sweat and finds the veiled woman standing at the foot of his bed. The flickering lantern she holds casts unearthly shadows across the room.

The holodeck program stimulates the Crewmember's autonomic fear reflex by covering him in cold, holographic sweat droplets. In most species the nervous system reacts to this outward sign of fear as it would internally-generated fear: By releasing adrenaline into the system. Unless the character makes a Moderate (7) Willpower Test, he becomes visibly shaken by Morea's sudden appearance. His obvious panic upsets Morea (assuming she's computer-run), causing her to cry and shake during the rest of the scene. This panic causes no long-term consequences.

As soon as Korvos speaks, the woman tells him to remain quiet. If caught in a man's bedchamber, her family can exile her to a nunnery, or even kill her. She knows she shouldn't be here, but she couldn't stay away. A compulsion seized her, as if in a dream. She and her family are among the many guests staying in the castle for the coronation. She entered the king's chamber through a secret passageway—she points to the door. But she can't properly recall how she got into the passageway in the first place. She only has a vague memory of wandering through a series of dank, cramped corridors.

She tells Korvos about her involvement in the curse. When she was very small, her mother took her to a marketplace. There a witch-woman accosted Morea and warned her that the curse of Korath's kings would destroy her, too, and that she was helpless to avoid her fate.

Morea has little other information for Korvos. She is ignorant of politics and has no knowledge of her father's plans. He veiled her hoping that the evil spirits would pass her by. She realizes now the veil merely singled her out, drawing the king's eye to her.

If asked why she risked coming to Korvos' bedchamber to speak with him, Morea claims she wants to keep the young king from harm, averting the curse if she can. Now he knows her involvement in it, perhaps he would raise his guard. As she draws closer to Korvos, leaning over the bed to gently caress his cheek, she also admits her attraction to the king. Morea knows their destinies are intertwined.

Troubleshooting: Don't explain how the holodeck makes the character afraid; just ask for the Willpower Test and tell the player his Crewmember breaks out in a cold sweat. If the player protests that his character wouldn't act that way, tell them he most certainly has. Later, if the Crewmember checks out the critical literature on this holonovel, he discovers how the programmer, Ralla'thain, achieved this disquieting effect, considered one of the landmarks in the holographic horror genre.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE BEAST STRIKES

ATTACK

This segment gives Racius some action for any player assuming his role. If Racius is computer-run, he manages to survive this encounter to provide background for the next scene. In the latter, the Narrator can describe this to Korvos' player as a cut scene (*ST: TNG RPG Narrator's Toolkit*, page 39); the holodeck simply plays out the scene for Korvos' player to witness—to give him necessary details and a sense of what's to come.

After the coronation, Racius also retires to his chambers, exhausted from the day's events. Although his chambers aren't as spacious as Korvos', they're still furnished with similar gloomy paintings and ancient furniture. He eventually succumbs to sleep.

Make a Moderate (7) Perception Test on the character's behalf.

If he succeeds, his keenly-honed instinct for danger wakes him. Something smells wrong, like rotten eggs. And Racius hears an odd dripping noise. After he lights a lamp or candle, Racius can scan the room.

THE CREATURE

Fitness: 10

Coordination: 8

Intellect: 1

Presence: 0

Willpower +5

Psi: 0

Skills: Unarmed Combat (Tentacle) 2 (7)

Resistance: 10

Wound Levels: 10/10/10/10/10/0

A noxious, steaming substance the color of a drowned corpse's skin streams down the wall from behind a painting. The substance gathers and pools on the floor. It sprouts multiple tentacles which—unless he immediately flees from his room—proceed to attack Racius.

If he fails, the creature gains surprise against Racius, making an uncountered attack against him while he sleeps. Racius cannot light a candle or lamp; because he can't see, add 3 to the Difficulty to hit the creature.

Racius is no match for the creature in combat. His best option is to flee. It isn't fast enough to pursue him.

AFTERMATH

Racius runs to Korvos' bedchamber and tells him he was attacked by some strange creature "unknown to science." He advises a return to the room to investigate. The hunt begins.

Troubleshooting: If the creature kills Racius, the next chapter begins when Korvos notices his friend is missing and goes to investigate. He finds Racius' mutilated corpse in the room, as well as the clues mentioned below. Drop his appearance throughout the rest of the holonovel, though you can remind Korvos of Racius' untimely demise to help motivate him (perhaps as a ghostly apparition).

CHAPTER NINE: THE HUNT

IN THE CASTLE

Korvos can bring as many guardsmen with him as he likes when he investigates Racius' bedchamber. When he bursts into the room, the creature is gone. However, it left a thick trail of slime down the wall from the painting. Behind the painting they find a peephole poking through into the next room, a disused chamber filled with broken furniture and other junk.

Clearing the room is hard work, especially since rusty and broken nails hide among the splintered wood debris. Characters removing the junk must make Moderate (6) Dexterity Tests to avoid scratching themselves on the nails. If they fail, they must make Challenging (10) Fitness Tests (adding any Vitality edge); failure means they become infected and add 1 to all Difficulties for the remainder of the holonovel. The computer hampers the stricken character using forcefields, and adjusts the sharpness of the holograms to simulate fever.

The debris shelters several nests of nasty, glistening centipedes. Anyone clearing the room must make a Challenging (9) Dexterity Test to avoid their bites, and, if bitten, a Difficult (12) Fitness Test to resist the poison (adding any Vitality edge). Centipede poison reduces its victim's Fitness by 1 for the rest of the adventure. Again, the computer simulates the effects of poisoning by reducing the image sharpness of its holograms and uses forcefields to retard movement.

The creature's slime coats some of the debris. When the room is clear, Korvos discovers a window leading out of the castle. It was covered in oil-paper which has since been torn away. The slime trail leads up to the opening. Characters poking their heads out the window see the trail leads down the castle wall to the ground.

THROUGH THE COUNTRYSIDE

The trail takes the searchers down into the castle moat and continues on the other side. Once the trail goes through the underbrush, it's no longer necessary to look for slime residue. The beast seems heavy enough to flatten tall grass, uproot small bushes and displace fist-sized stones—its passage is obvious. Racius calculates from its tracks that the creature weighs at least half a ton and moves without the aid of legs. If Racius is a player persona, cue him to make a Moderate (8) Physical Sciences (Physics) Test to provide this colorful but useless nugget of information.

The monster's trail leads into the dark heart of the Korathian forest. The land around the castle is rugged and inhospitable. Travel on foot is slow; slippery rocks lie in wait to twist the ankles of the unwary. Twisted trees and thick weeds clutch and grab at those who pass through them, tearing at clothing and scratching flesh. Howling wolves, hooting owls and chirping bats fill the night air. At times their sounds seem like voices calling to Korvos: "Join us."

Suddenly Korvos hears screams in the distance. The cries lead the hunters to a clearing with a cluster of peasant huts surrounded by pathetic plots of plowed land. The screaming comes from one of the huts.

CHAPTER TEN: MURDER IN THE HUT

When Korvos enters the tumble-down hut, Ganiri sprawls on his hut's dirt floor dead from multiple wounds to the chest and neck. His wife, Alichza, slumps unconscious against the wall, a bruise welling up on her brow.

Although at first glance it seems the creature did this, a successful Routine (4) Perception Test shows someone stabbed Ganiri with an edged weapon. A Moderate (7) Medical Sciences (Forensics) Test reveals a four-inch dagger inflicted the wounds. Ganiri clutches a bundle of green threads in his hand, tangled in loops of fuzzy fibers, as if torn from a piece of green velvet.

A successful Routine (6) First Aid Test revives Alichza. She claims men did this—noblemen and their retainers. She hadn't seen any of them before, and the group didn't include her landlord or his men.

The killers aren't far away. Their horses' hoofprints still cover the road, heading back to Castle Korath. Korvos can follow the trail with a successful Tracking Skill Test against a Routine (4) Difficulty. Apparently guests of the king committed this crime.

QUESTIONING THE GUESTS

When Korvos arrives back at the castle, he might ask his sentries if anyone has just come through the gates. They confirm a party of about a dozen men, led by Ionus, just returned to the fortress.

If he gathers Ionus and his retainers, they deny they had any hand in Ganiri's death. They claim they were only out riding. But one of Ionus' cousins, a gap-toothed bruiser named Actos, wears a green velvet tunic torn at the collar. Allow Korvos to argue with Ionus for a while before noticing this detail, unless the king asks specifically if anyone wears a green article of clothing.

When Korvos notices this clue, he finds his right arm heading to his sword hilt without his conscious volition. Before he can even begin to restrain this uncontrollable impulse, he draws his rapier and plunges it between Actos' ribs. Actos slumps to the ground, killed instantly. (The program achieves this disquieting effect by momentarily making the participant's real arm invisible—it covers the arm in a pattern matching the holographic surroundings—and creating a holographic image of the participant's arm skewering Actos. The illusion works because it happens very quickly. Again, the participant only discovers how the program achieves this by researching Ralla'thain's programming techniques after the fact.)

Other members of Ionus' party reach for their own weapons, but he restrains them: "He is the king! We cannot act against him in his own castle!" Then he looks at Korvos, a wild gleam in his eyes. "You have more of your ancestors' blood in you than I thought, my liege. Now you need only learn the proper targets for the rage that burns within you."

Ionus now admits he ordered Ganiri's murder. It was perfectly legal because he asked permission of the peasant's lord. As a Korathian noble he has every right to avenge an insult against the king and those of noble blood. Ganiri was disloyal and deserved to die. Korvos, Ionus says, will one day be grateful his nobles acted to protect his interests.

Korvos may want to strike at Ionus. Provide him with reasons not to—particularly that it shows Korvos' impulsive weakness against the nobility. If Racius knows about Morea, he reminds Korvos that Ionus is the father of the woman he loves.

On a Moderate (6) Intellect or Social Sciences (Sociology) Test, Korvos realizes Ionus acted within the rights and traditions of Korath. He maintains influence over the other nobles, while Korvos has yet to prove himself. The king must consolidate his position before punishing Ionus—which perhaps he should forget about doing at all. If the participant doesn't realize this, Elmuth shows up and explain it to him—earning the additional contempt of the nobles. Korvos suffers a -1 penalty in all subsequent interactions with them.

Fortunately nobody much liked Actos. Provided Korvos cedes some land to his family as compensation for his death, the nobles attribute this unfortunate

incident to the usual exuberance and temper of Korathian kings.

Troubleshooting: If Ganiri was killed or imprisoned in Chapter Six, you'll need to substitute another peasant here—perhaps one of Ganiri's sons. Although the scene won't have as great an impact, the plot itself won't change too much.

If Korvos somehow disposes of Ionus, another equally vicious noble takes the lead in Chapter Sixteen.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: A BLADE FOR MOREA

After the incident with Ionus and the nobles, Korvos can return to his chambers to sort through the politics of his new position, search for further clues about the creature, or acquaint himself with his royal duties.

If Korvos does not seem suitably disturbed by the sword incident, run a dream sequence where he finds himself stabbing Ionus, then Elmuth, then Racius, then Morea. As before, when Korvos' player lies down on the bed, the holodeck projects a cut scene for him to watch. He "wakes" up in a cold sweat, using the same effect described previously.

The scripted action continues when Korvos next meets with Morea. (Engineer an encounter if he does-



n't seek her out; she might seek him out in his chambers). As they discuss Korathian politics, Ganiri's murder or Ionus' motives, another of the castle's secret panels pops open—a dagger flies toward Morea. With a successful Moderate (7) Test of Unarmed Combat or Acrobatics, Korvos can leap into the dagger's path and knock it away. Even if he fails, though, the dagger barely misses Morea, lodging in a nearby support beam or thick piece of wooden furniture.

Korvos can pursue this assassin, running through the secret passageways honeycombing the castle until Korvos tackles him. Have Korvos' player make an Opposed Athletics (Running) Test to catch up with his quarry. If Korvos doesn't outrun him, the knife-thrower loses his way, turns up a dead-end corridor and surrenders, pleading for mercy.

The assailant is Hunçek, one of the bandits encountered during Korvos' journey to the fortress. He crumbles under the onslaught of questions and accusations from the king, the result of some good roleplaying and a Routine (4) Interrogation Test from Korvos. Other interaction skills, like Command (Regal Authority), obtain the same results, though the difficulty increases by two.

Hunçek confesses the priest Elmuth let him into the castle to kill Morea. Korvos might recall that Elmuth said—during Ganiri's intrusion at the coronation—no one could enter the castle without his permission.

Since Hunçek has no further importance to the story, Korvos can mete out whatever punishment he deems appropriate. Korvos must now discover why his chief adviser tried to kill his lady-love.

Troubleshooting: If Hunçek died during the brig-and-assault against Korvos earlier, use one of his bandit accomplices in this chapter. If all the bandits were killed, this one is from a different gang entirely.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE SWORD-ARM OF KAROS

Racius should not be present for this Chapter. If Korvos seeks him out before confronting Elmuth, he's unable to find him: he's been seized by Ionus and his cronies. (If another Crewmember portrays Racius, you can roleplay this encounter; be sure to keep it fair. Several determined thugs should be able to subdue Racius. And don't let Korvos interfere with the kidnapping—he has no way of knowing what's happening to his friend).

A search for Racius is fruitless at this point. If Korvos spends too much time at it and ignores the opportunity to gain information from Elmuth, he finds the priest dead, slain by the creature, and is unable to get the vital plot point he needs to figure out how to end the curse. The adventure ends in death and defeat, until the player restarts it and gets it right.

After Hunçek's confession, Korvos should be eager to seek out his priestly adviser for answers. He finds Elmuth in his study, a cramped, cobwebby library piled high with books. Elmuth makes few concessions

to his own comfort, even sleeping on a dusty pallet in a corner. Tall, smoky candles illuminate the chamber.

When confronted with the evidence of his attempt on Morea's life, Elmuth denies it at first. When Korvos presses him—with some roleplayed concerns and a Moderate (7) Presence, Command, Persuasion or Intimidation Test—he confesses. Elmuth throws himself at Korvos' feet, declares himself a loyal son of Korath, and says he acted only to protect him, and the people, from the curse.

When asked why he tried to assassinate Morea, he rummages about in his pile of scholarly junk until he uncovers a large painting concealed behind an old, stained cloth. The dark, heavily varnished canvas depicts a king with Korvos' features about to behead a gaggle of helpless prisoners in the throne room. A queen who looks like Morea gazes at the scene in undisguised pleasure.

Elmuth asks Korvos who he thinks the painting depicts, expecting him to name his grandfather, Korvos the Swift, and his queen, Bloody Besaria. But Elmuth corrects him. The scene shows Karos, who founded the dynasty 370 years ago. The curse began when Karos seized power in a bloody revolt. The curse is cyclical: some kings manifest it more strongly than others. These kings are always born with a sixth finger growing near the right hand's little finger.



Elmuth tells Korvos to look at his hand, at his scar. (Remind the player he noticed it during the holonovel's very first scene.) "You are one of the cursed ones, Korvos, just like your grandfather." Elmuth removed the extra finger from Korvos' hand at birth, at his mother's insistence. When the king of Ælberoth defeated Korvos the Swift and demanded a hostage, Elmuth suggested young Korvos go to Marwand's court in hopes he could escape the curse. But the evil spirits were too strong—they killed Oacan and his other sons to bring Korvos back. They have become hungry again.

The worst of the cursed kings always kept a consort. She always looked like Morea. Ionus tried to hide her from Korvos with that veil. In desperation Elmuth ordered her killed. He knows now it was foolish to try. Fighting the curse is like evading destiny: Futile.

THE CURSE'S ORIGINS

When Korvos asks Elmuth how Karos brought the curse upon himself, the priest relates the ancient tale.

Korath was a weak province in those days, overrun by neighboring states whose names, borders and ruling families changed long ago. Its young king, Karos, was but a puppet. He wanted to reclaim the nation's sovereignty. He could have spent heroic decades in behind-the-scenes struggles against his foes, but he was impatient. Instead he performed a black magic ceremony, invited all the evil spirits of the world to inhabit his nation, to give strength to his sword arm so he might sweep his foes from the face of the planet. With this otherworldly power Karos slayed the occupying armies and their leaders almost single-handedly.

He conquered an empire for himself. His defeated neighbors finally rose up and destroyed him, again feeding the hungry spirits with the blood of the vanquished. The spirits were not content with this, though. Since then they have depended on the sons of Karos to periodically slake their bloodlust, channeling their power into the cursed king's sword arm. Destiny is on their side. The creature is the instrument of that fate. Whether he likes it or not, Korvos is doomed to do its bidding.

Troubleshooting: If Korvos fails to learn the origin of the curse, he'll eventually lose the adventure, and must continue replaying it until he learns the truth in this chapter. Ralla'thain's didn't compose his horror holonovels to be forgiving.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: BLOOD OF A PRIEST

As Elmuth's tale draws to a close, moisture dripping from above distracts him. Each time a drop hits him he twitches, brushes his vestments and changes position. Then comes another drop. Then the drops fall harder and faster. They're not just water, Korvos sees: it's the same slimy residue he saw while tracking the creature. Elmuth screams as the shower of goo

begins burning his flesh. Unless Korvos blocks his flight, the priest runs out of his chamber. The stone ceiling above rattles and shakes in a wave of movement that runs toward the door.

Elmuth's flight into the hallway does him no good; congealing ropes of mucus drop down and trap him. The goo darkens, solidifies and coalesces into tentacles. Korvos can try hacking away at the tentacles, which grow and strengthen their hold upon the screaming priest. Every successful Moderate (7) Primitive Weapon Test severs one of them. But there are too many. When you feel the horror of Elmuth's helplessness reaches its peak, the tentacles abruptly yank him upward, as if he is nothing more than a marionette. With a dull crunch, Elmuth's head impacts with the ceiling stones. Again and again the tentacles loosen, drop Elmuth down, then yank him up again. His neck breaks the second time, the rest is the monster's idea of play.

A hissing voice whispers from nowhere and everywhere. "He's outlived his usefulness. He never should have tried to stop us. We wanted to play with you more before you joined us." Upon hearing this voice, Korvos' right arm breaks out in a cold, slimy sweat. It suddenly seems stronger, but also feels like something apart from him, something evil.

Assuming Korvos refuses to join the creature at this point, the creature responds: "Then your friend is next to die. He should never have polluted our soil with his foreign presence."

Troubleshooting: Korvos is unlikely to join the monster; the player should know it's contrary to genre conventions for the hero to willingly surrender to evil. Emphasize the creature "playing" with Elmuth's death and its statement that "We wanted to play with you more before you joined us."

If he joins the creature, it demands Korvos make war on Ælberoth. The player may play for time while looking for a way to betray the monster. As he seemingly goes along with the creature, things become worse. The monster kills Raciis and anyone else from whom Korvos seeks aid. Morea goes mad and becomes a bloodthirsty advocate of the creature's agenda. The monster pushes Korvos toward every greater acts of horror and brutality; the monster wants him to capture, torture and kill Marwand and Theguis.

If Korvos engages in acts of evil, even severing his arm comes too late. The story ends with Korvos the Conqueror going slowly mad in his castle as avenging armies from neighboring countries come to destroy him in a sequence reminiscent of the conclusion of Macbeth.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: EYES GLAZED IN FIRE

When Korvos desperately runs to find Raciis before the creature kills him, Ionus and his entourage block the king's path. He can tell from their glazed eyes that they've been driven completely mad. They're hooting, drooling, and waving their swords at him.

"Accept your destiny!" Ionus cries. "We've accepted ours! Declare war! War! War!"

If they've kidnapped Racius (necessary if Korvos tried to find him before confronting Elmuth), they boast they've disposed of the "foreign scum." They tell Korvos he can find his pet rogue in the wine cellar. "He is but the first of his kind to die by the glorious swords of Korath!" Ionus cackles.

If Korvos mentions concern for Morea, Ionus drools and says he's free to take her if he embraces his true destiny.

A Difficult (13) Test of Presence, Command or Intimidation and some cleverly worded roleplaying calms Ionus down from his madness. If Korvos accumulated a positive modifier dealing with Ionus and nobles in general, he can apply that here. He can also use Empathy or Persuasion if these work better for him. If Korvos succeeds, Ionus sinks to his knees, clutches his head in his hands and cries out that he's fallen prey to the curse of Korath. His cronies' senses also temporarily return, and they try to console Ionus. They let Korvos pass.

If Korvos fails to talk them down, he must fight his way past them. Ionus steps forward and demands a one-on-one duel. Ionus drives at Korvos with a fanatical gleam in his eye, rapier flashing in the flickering

torchlight. Ionus stops fighting if wounded—in this event, the others let Korvos pass while they tend to their leader.

Troubleshooting: Disaster results if Ionus beats Korvos. The creature murders Racius while he's recovering and Morea goes mad. Korvos can still destroy the curse if he cuts off his own arm before harming any innocents or declaring war. Otherwise, the story proceeds inexorably to the doom-laden ending described in the "Troubleshooting" entry for the last chapter.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: IN DUTY'S NAME

If Ionus waylaid Racius, Korvos discovers him in the wine cellar, his mortally wounded body crumpled up in an old barrel. Otherwise Korvos finds his friend in his bedchamber, dying from wounds sustained during the creature's attack.

As Korvos races to his friend's aid, the creature toys with him by dropping its tentacles down through the cracks between ceiling stones, trying to slow him down. To make his way through the tentacles in time, Korvos must accumulate 16 points in a Moderate (8) Extended Test of Unarmed Combat, Acrobatics, or Athletics; the test lasts for 5 Turns.

If he succeeds, Korvos reaches a mortally wounded Racius. His friend confirms the creature attacked him or Ionus ambushed him, and gasps a request that Korvos tell King Marwand he perished doing his duty. Racius admits Korvos was a true friend after all, and then heroically dies. Racius' courage inspires Korvos, who gains a +1 die bonus on all Tests undertaken in the next scene.

Troubleshooting: If Racius died in some other manner, you may skip this chapter entirely. If a player takes the role of Racius, he may choose to die according to the script, or can try to outfight the creature. This attempt is likely to fail, but if the player really wants to experience a holographic simulation of his death at the hands of a shambling terror, so be it....

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: THE THING IN THE DUNGEON

MOREA'S SCREAM

Korvos hears a heart-rending scream for help. He instantly recognizes the voice as Morea's. By following the sound of her cries, he tracks her to the castle's dungeon.

As he runs through the fortress hallways and down its many flights of stairs, Korvos leaves behind any guardsmen brave enough to follow his orders to accompany him. The evil spirits to whom King Karos pledged fealty manifest themselves. Their leering faces and twisted bodies seep out of the stone walls. Their gnarled arms emerge and grab anyone else with Korvos, crushing their bodies against the walls. Attempts to harm them or break their iron grip fail.



THE DUNGEON

The creature seized Morea to lure Korvos here. It hopes he recognizes his true nature when he sees the implements of torture, and embraces the bloodthirsty destiny of his ancestors. The creature causes the braziers to flare so Korvos can see the monster's horrific form clearly. It appears as a writhing mass of bubbling ichor, slime, and ropy tentacles—some firmly grasping Morea and clutching her delicate throat.

To destroy the monster Korvos must sever his own right arm, where his family curse is centered. The guillotine conveniently located in the dungeon's far corner seems the best way to achieve this. When the creature sees Korvos running toward

Korvos sees his own arm lying in a pool of blood on the guillotine's other side. The creature releases Morea, assuming she is still alive. It then puffs up in a watery, contorted mass, mewling and shrieking, and

The horror and realism of the so-called "arm effect." is one reason this program is so celebrated. The deck's holographic imagers alter the participant's body image so his own arm seems invisible. He can still feel his arm if he tries, but the illusion is so powerful no amount of physical reassurance can counter the profound disturbance of seeing one's arm amputated. To heighten the illusion, the forcefields which give physical substance to characters and objects on the holodeck vanish when the character tries to touch them with the "severed arm" during this scene or the next.

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finally explodes in a rancid shower of ichor. As Korvos passes out from loss of blood, he knows he defeated the curse.

Troubleshooting: Mercy has no place in this scene. If the player fights the creature and fails, he can always restart the program at an earlier point and try again.

EPILOGUE: SUNLIGHT IN KORATH

When Korvos wakes, he's aware time has passed—nearly a year—and that the great weight of the curse has lifted from himself and his kingdom. He stands in a courtyard much like the one in Marwand's villa from the holonovel's beginning. A celebratory atmosphere fills the air. A brass band plays festive music. Guests wear dress uniforms, fine suits or colorful frocks. Servants dish out a sumptuous buffet. Marwand, Theguis and Rebara stand with their retinue, admiring a memorial bust of Racius positioned in a place of honor. (Obviously if Racius somehow survived he accompanies the Ælberoth delegation, instead of adorning the courtyard as a piece of statuary.)

This is Korvos' new castle, still under construction, but sunny and bright. The sky above shines bright blue with few clouds, and the light breeze blows warm and inviting. The hill where the old Castle Korath lurked stands in the distance; workers busily tear down the ancient edifice.

Korvos apparently adjusted to the loss of his arm; the right sleeve of his dress tunic is pinned to its breast. Morea carries a newborn child wrapped in a blanket of powder-blue silk. A young priest stands in the center of the courtyard, readying himself to bless their child and conduct the naming ceremony. Korvos and Morea move towards him while their gathered friends and family applaud. The baby pokes his right arm from the blanket—the hand is unblemished, naturally born with no cursed sixth finger.

The program ends here. Participants may continue interacting with party guests if they wish.

SEQUELS

Korvos deserves to enjoy his hard-won victory by settling down to an unadventurous "happily ever after" life in the land he's redeemed. The sequels instead focus on his descendants.

The Madness Genome: Two descendants of the Korathian royal family battle over the ancestral curse. During the Plague Years, Erik Korvos frantically tries to apprehend his mad half-brother, Francek, a genius who plans to install himself as world tyrant with the false promise of a cure to the virus that ravaged Alpha Centauri during that dark time in its history.

The scheme is totally insane, but if Francek finds the ritual ground on which their ancestor, Karos, made the original pact with the evil spirits, there might be a chance for it to work.

The Things on the Rocks: This prequel features Theguis, Korvos and Racius as they uncover an occult conspiracy while summering in a picturesque coastal town in Ælberoth. Korath's evil spirits secretly inspire a cult to abduct residents of nearby kingdoms for diabolical purposes. During this story Racius' scientific rationalism remains intact for his role in *The Doom That Came to Korath*.

THE FALCOLN'S GOLD A HOLONOVEL OF THE SPANISH MAIN

The year, 1653. The place, the Spanish Main. The gallant Captain Beauregard and the crew of the feared pirate ship *Atocha* have plied these waters for years, taking prizes from Spanish galleons and fighting off the Spanish Navy. The vicious pirate captain Ironface poses the greatest threat. When Ironface tries to disrupt the exchange of a beautiful hostage for ransom, he sparks a chain of events which leads Captain Beauregard and his men on a quest not only for final revenge, but for a legendary, long-lost treasure.

THE MAIN CHARACTERS

CREWMEMBER PERSONAE

The protagonists of *The Falcon's Gold* crew the pirate galleon *Atocha*. They sailed the seas together for many years. The crew shows great loyalty, camaraderie, morale and faith in the captain, who seems to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat time after time.

The holoprogrammers designed *The Falcon's Gold* for play-by-one or more participants. If only one person plays, he takes the hero's role, the Robin Hood-like pirate Captain Beauregard. If two or more people play, one becomes Captain Beauregard, the others his trusty crew. If you run this adventure for multiple players, ask each to roll one die. The person with the highest result gets the role of Captain Beauregard (or whichever role he prefers); the other players pick characters in order of their die rolls. In the event no one chooses Captain Beauregard, run him as a Supporting Cast character, or promote one of the other roles to captain. Narrators may use the existing statistics to run any character as an NPC.

CAPTAIN BEAUREGARD

Captain Beauregard commands the *Atocha*. He apparently has no first name; pirates throughout the Spanish Main know him simply as "Beauregard." Young, handsome and charming, he seems nothing like a stereotypical pirate captain—in fact he is not. Captain Beauregard's real name is Robert Southey. Some years ago he served as captain aboard a privateer sailing under Letters of Marque and Reprisal from the Dutch. After he completed several missions for the Dutch, they betrayed him to the Spanish, who clapped him into chains and threw him into a New Andalusian prison. He spent over a year in that hell hole before escaping.

He later made his way to Port Royal and, through unknown means, obtained a fine ship, the *Atocha*, and recruited a crew of pirates willing to obey his strict moral code. Since then he and the *Atocha* have plied the waters of the Caribbean, looting Spanish and Dutch ships. They donate much of the booty to the sick and needy. In the taverns of Port Royal and other pirate havens, grizzled salts whisper that Captain Beauregard sold his soul to the Devil for the power to avoid the warships of the Spanish Navy.

GENRE TEMPLATE: SWASHBUCKLING PIRACY

Examples: Movies: *Captain Blood*, *The Sea Hawk*. Novels: *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Imagery: The Spanish Main. Gold doubloons and pieces of eight. Men with cutlasses in their hands and daggers clenched between their teeth swinging from the rigging onto an enemy's ship. The roar of cannons and smell of gunpowder. Peg legs, eyepatches and hook hands. Walking the plank.

Themes: "Good" pirates robbing from corrupt rulers, "the enemy" (Spain, Holland, England or other authorities) and "bad" pirates in a rollicking, swashbuckling fashion. The Captain falls in love with a beautiful woman of virtue and must convince her he is more noble than villain.

Stock Characters:

The Captain: Bold, dashing, daring and handsome, the Captain rules his men with an iron hand and stern, yet secretly golden, heart. His background often involves some betrayal which drove him to the pirate's outlaw life.

Quote: "Prepare for boarding action!"

The First Mate: The captain's right-hand man, the First Mate relates his orders to the crew and often acts as his ally when the captain's odd behavior starts the men muttering about mutiny.

Quote: "Aye, aye, Cap'n!"

The Cabin Boy: This lowly servant often hides some secret. This subservient role best suits disguised women, or the sons of rich nobles running off to sea to escape oppressive circumstances at home.

Quote: "Can I get you anything else, Cap'n sir?"

The Rival: For every good captain there's one with a heart black as a moonless sea and foul as the stench of gunpowder. He and the Captain clashed repeatedly over the years, neither ever quite able to gain the upper hand.

Quote: "This time, Beauregard, I'll blow your ship to the bottom of the sea!"

Plot Devices: A long-lost treasure map provides a clue to the location of a rich treasure. The Captain and the Rival, with their respective crews, race to catch the same prize.

CAPTAIN BEAUREGARD

Role: Protagonist

Type: Captain

Backstory: Former Dutch privateer betrayed to the Spanish.

Demeanor: Devil-may-care, swashbuckling attitude; rob from the rich, give to the poor.

Goals: For this adventure, Beauregard wants to defeat Ironface and recover the gold from the Falcon. In general he seeks revenge upon the Spanish and Dutch, hinders wealthy

oppressors while aiding the oppressed, and, eventually, hopes to restore his good name.

Costume: Brown leather breeches, white shirt, black boots, cutlass.

RABICAN D'ORLEANS

Captain Beauregard's oldest friend, Rabican d'Orleans, serves as his first mate. A large man with a thick, black beard and a hearty laugh, Rabican comes from Paris, where he was raised in a noble family. Bored with his life there, he ran away to sea and served on a merchant ship—the first one waylaid by Captain Beauregard. Sensing opportunity, Rabican joined the pirate crew. He possessed a quick wit, skill with the cutlass and a willingness to enforce the iron discipline necessary on a pirate ship. He quickly worked his way up the ranks, for his talents and jovial manner earned Captain Beauregard's admiration. He now serves as first mate aboard the *Atocha*.

RABICAN D'ORLEANS

Role: Protagonist

Type: First Mate

Backstory: A nobleman's son who ran away to sea and eventually became a pirate under Captain Beauregard.

Demeanor: Inquisitive, watchful, alert.

Goals: Rabican supports Beauregard's goals of aiding the oppressed and downtrodden. Having suffered at the hands of Ironface himself, he's also more than willing to help his Captain against the evil pirate.

Costume: Simple homespun clothes, patched in places. He always carries a knife and a flint-lock pistol.

ALEXANDER SEVASTOPOL

Alexander Sevastopol serves as the *Atocha's* chief helmsman, steering the ship where Captain Beauregard wishes. Several junior helmsmen serve under him. "Vas," as the crew calls him, is a calm, quiet man who's the very Devil with a cutlass. He only really seems to come alive during boarding actions and barroom brawls.

ALEXANDER SEVASTOPOL

Role: Protagonist

Type: Supporting Character

Backstory: A Russian farmer's son who ran away to sea to escape poverty back home.

Demeanor: Usually "Vas" is a quiet, somber man who executes his duties and little else. In a fight, though, he flares into life like a lit match, striking at his enemies with such skill and fury you'd think Lucifer himself lit the fire.

Goals: Avoid being caught, capture rich prizes, steer the course true.

Costume: Sevastopol wears a loose-fitting white shirt with tight black breeches and boots on most days, and cuts a truly dashing figure at the helm. He wears his trusty cutlass everywhere.

AREND FABRICUS

Before the crew can fight in a boarding action, the *Atocha* must first disable the target ship with cannon fire. The chief gunner, Arend Fabricus, makes sure the ship is stocked with plenty of powder and shot, keeps the cannons in good repair, and trains the crew to fire them accurately. So far he has not disappointed Captain Beauregard. Danish by birth, he possesses some education, for he often spends his free time engaged in foolish activities like reading and writing.

AREND FABRICUS

Role: Protagonist

Type: Supporting Character

Backstory: Once a student with a promising career ahead of him, Fabricus realized one day the ways of a scholar were slowly strangling the life out of him. He put the books aside and went to sea, eventually drifting into the pirate's life. He still enjoys reading occasionally.

Demeanor: A fierce commander and disciplinarian when on duty, Fabricus becomes a sort of pirate-philosopher off duty, moodily discussing topics which generally mystify his crewmates.

Goals: Keep the cannons ready to fire, win every battle, capture rich prizes.

Costume: Grimy, powder- and grease-stained clothes.

HAROLD "HARRY" BURNS

When the *Atocha* engages in battle, it often suffers damage. The ship's carpenter, Harold "Harry" Burns, repairs that damage and keeps the ship afloat. He is known as something of a miracle worker.

HAROLD "HARRY" BURNS

Role: Protagonist

Type: Supporting Character

Backstory: Formerly a loyal officer in His Majesty's Navy, the happy-go-lucky Burns decided the outlaw life was more to his liking than the military's strict discipline and poor pay. The British subsequently put a price on his head.

Demeanor: Gregarious, friendly

Goals: Keep the ship in good repair (or at least from sinking)

Costume: Sturdy work clothes and a leather toolbelt.

DR. ABERNATHY MONTGOMERY

After his wife and children died of a terrible illness, Dr. Abernathy Montgomery fled England to live in the New World. He spent years as a Caribbean drunk, using his medical skills to keep himself supplied with rum. Captain Beauregard recognized him as a decent man torn by grief and pain, and helped him to gradually heal his old wounds. Doctor Montgomery now serves as ship's surgeon aboard the *Atocha*; though he still has a tendency to drink too much, he no longer lets it interfere with his medical duties as he once did.

DR. ABERNATHY MONTGOMERY

Role: Protagonist

Type: Doctor fleeing from his past.

Backstory: A talented doctor who fled his family's death and sought to bury his pain in drink, Abernathy was rescued by Captain Beauregard and recruited as the *Atocha's* physician.

Demeanor: Depressed, brooding, has his mind on something else.

Goals: Keep his crewmates healthy, try to forget his dead wife and child.

Costume: Sturdy shipboard work clothes.

SEÑORITA ESTRELLA DELGADO-ALBERNAZ

Señorita Estrella Delgado-Albernaz enters the holonovel as a captive Captain Beauregard abducted for ransom. She'd normally leave the story in Chapter Three. If she appeals to any player as a character, Estrella can choose to remain on the *Atocha*, continue to develop a relationship with Captain Beauregard and become a pirate queen.

No shrinking violet, Estrella often voices her opinions about all matters and lavishes scorn upon anyone who treats her less chivalrously than she feels appropriate. She's even a decent shot with a pistol.

SEÑORITA ESTRELLA DELGADO-ALBERNAZ

Role: Protagonist

Type: Supporting Cast

Backstory: The daughter of the merchant Captain Delgado, Estrella embodies everything virtuous, beautiful and daring in a woman.

Demeanor: Extremely outgoing and assertive for a woman of her age and station.

Goals: Get back home safely (or join Captain Beauregard's crew and begin a romantic relationship with him).

Costume: When kidnapped Estrella wears an elegant gown barely practical enough for shipboard life. If she ends up joining the *Atocha's* crew, she may adopt more functional pirate garb.

HOLOGRAPHIC CHARACTERS

This adventure is written to provide characters for all the main cast members commonly found in a *Star Trek* series—the Captain, Engineer, Doctor. It is possible, however, that not every persona in this story will be taken by a Crewmember. If this is the case, the computer (i.e., the Narrator) plays them:

Captain Beauregard

Fitness: 3

Vitality +1

Coordination: 4

Reaction +1

Dexterity +1

Intellect: 3

Presence: 4

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Command (Pirate Vessel) 4 (5), Language—Spanish 1, Primitive Weaponry (Sword) 3 (4), Projectile Weapons (Flintlock Pistol) 2 (3), Shipboard Systems (Tactical) 2 (3), Vehicle Operation (Galleon) 3 (4)

Special Skills: Naval Tactics (Spanish) 3 (4)

Traits: Sexy +2, Strong Will +2, Code Of Honor (“good” pirate) -2, Sworn Enemy (Ironface) -1

Resistance: 4

D’Orleans

Fitness: 3

Coordination: 3

Intellect: 3

Perception +1

Presence: 3

Willpower +1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Command (Pirate Vessel) 2 (3), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) 2 (3), Projectile Weapons (Flintlock Pistol) 3 (4), Shipboard Systems (Tactical) 2 (3), Vehicle Operation (Galleon) 2 (3)

Special Skills: Naval Tactics (English) 2 (3)

Traits: Innovative +1

Resistance: 3

Sevastopol

Fitness: 2

Vitality +1

Coordination: 4

Dexterity +2

Reaction +1

Intellect: 2

Presence: 2

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Command (Pirate Vessel) 1 (2), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) 4 (5), Projectile Weapons (Flintlock Pistol) 1 (2), Shipboard Systems (Navigation) 3 (4), Vehicle Operation (Galleon) 3 (4)

Special Skills: Naval Tactics (Spanish) 2 (3)

Traits: Toughness +2, Weapon Master (Cutlass) +4

Resistance: 4

Fabricus

Fitness: 2

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 3

Logic +1

Perception +1

Presence: 2

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Command (Pirate Vessel) 1 (2), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) 1 (2), Projectile Weapons (Flintlock Pistol) 1 (2), Shipboard Systems (Tactical) 3 (4), Vehicle Operation (Galleon) 2 (3)

Special Skills: Naval Tactics (Spanish) 3 (4)

Resistance: 2

Harold “Harry” Burns

Fitness: 3

Strength +1

Coordination: 3

Intellect: 2

Presence: 2

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Materials Engineering (Nautical) 3 (4), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) 1 (2), Projectile Weapons (Flintlock Pistol) 1 (2), Vehicle Operation (Galleon) 1 (2)

Special Skills: Naval Tactics (Spanish) 1 (2)

Traits: Dark Secret -3

Resistance: 3

Dr. Abernathy Montgomery

Fitness: 3

Vitality +2

Coordination: 3

Reaction +1

Intellect: 3

Perception +1

Presence: 4

Willpower +1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Command (Pirate Vessel) 1 (2), Medical Sciences (General Medicine) 3 (4), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) 1 (2), Projectile Weapons (Flintlock Pistol) 1 (2), Vehicle Operation (Galleon) 1 (2)

Special Skills: Naval Tactics (Spanish) 1 (2)

Resistance: 5

Senorita Estrella Delgado-Albernaz

Fitness: 2

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 3

Perception +1

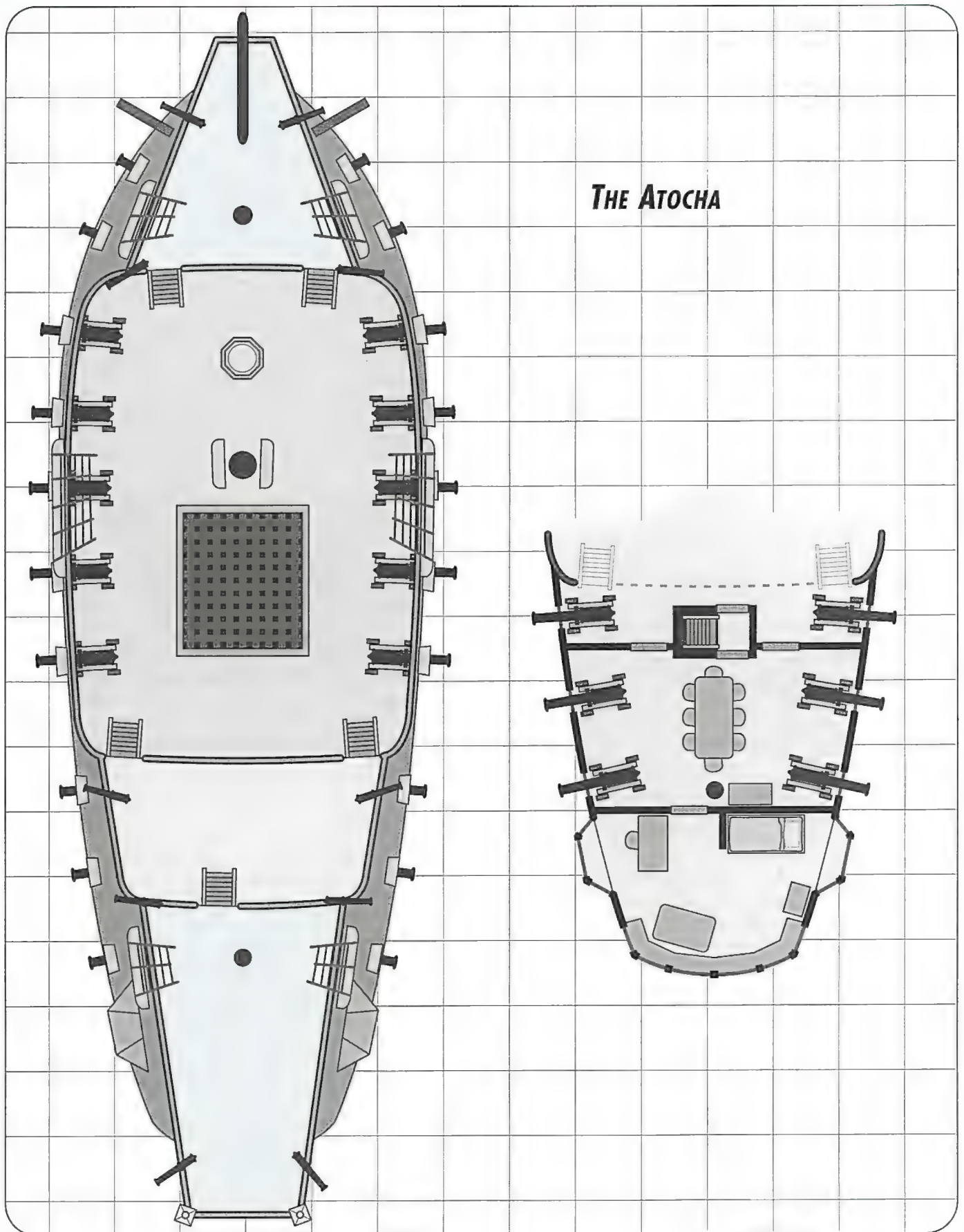
Presence: 2

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Charm (Influence) 2 (3), Projectile Weapons (Flintlock Pistol) 2 (3)

Resistance: 2

THE ATOCHA



THE ATOCHA

Beauregard's pirate ship itself deserves some mention, since it's almost like a character. The *Atocha* is a galleon. It sports the standard complement of cannon (see below) and crew. Its raised decks port and aft and tall rigging are perfect for daring acrobatic leaps and last-minute swings to safety.

OTHER CREWMEN

The *Atocha* has plenty of other roles available for characters to fill if they desire. Examples include the purser (in charge of supplies and equipment), the master-at-arms, cabin boys, the ship's cooper (barrel-maker), ordinary seamen, and even Scurvy Dog, the ship's sometimes cantankerous cat.

Positions on a pirate ship correspond to those on a starship to a certain degree. Characters may choose pirate jobs which mirror their day-to-day Starfleet jobs. For example, a high-ranking officer becomes the Captain or first mate; a Flight Control or Tactical officer a helmsman or gunner; an Engineer the ship's carpenter or gunner; and a member of the starship's medical staff the ship's doctor. This works well, since characters often know skills relevant to their holonovel roles. On the other hand, some characters may

prefer a change of pace—rather than practicing engineering in a different venue, an Engineer may try his hand at command or medicine.

Although women were not common on pirate ships, in this holonovel the characters can have whatever gender the Crewmembers playing them want with a simple program alteration. Any male protagonist described above can be changed to a female role with an order to the computer and a simple change of name.

SUPPORTING CAST CHARACTERS

The following villainous knaves oppose our heroes:

IRONFACE

A vicious pirate captain who stands for all that is foul and evil about pirates and piracy. Ironface commands the *Reaver*, a powerful ship. His scar-covered, powder-burned, smoke-stained face gives him his name. He and Captain Beauregard are long and bitter enemies.

Ironface's crew seems to model itself on its master. Cruel and depraved, they think nothing of butchery, robbery and rapine.

AUGUST'N ANTONIO LOPEZ-PAZOS DE SEPÚLVEDA

August'n Antonio Lopez-Pazos de Sepúlveda rules as Viceroy of New Spain (roughly present-day Mexico). A corrupt and venal man, he cuts secret deals with Ironface and other notorious pirates, alerting them of potential prizes in return for his share of the loot. He has long wished to capture Captain Beauregard, who made his life miserable by plundering many Spanish treasure ships.

SYNOPSIS

The Falcon's Gold opens in *media res* with a battle between the *Atocha* and the crew of a Spanish flute bound for Spain with a cargo of New World gold. Soon the captain of the flute, Ricardo Delgado-Ruiz, realizes the situation is hopeless. Hoping to save his life, those of his crew, and most importantly the life of his beautiful daughter Estrella, he surrenders to the bold Captain Beauregard.

After looting the ship, Captain Beauregard takes Estrella captive so Captain Delgado can later pay ransom for her. They agree to meet in Port Royal in a month to exchange her for a thousand pieces of eight. Treated with all reasonable courtesy, Estrella soon develops an attraction for the dashing Captain Beauregard.

A month later Captain Beauregard and his crew meet Captain Delgado at the Zaragosa, a tavern in the infamous pirate haven Port Royal on the island of Jamaica. A smooth transfer of gold for girl soon turns



into a swirling barroom melee when Ironface and his crew attack! Somehow they found out about the exchange and hope to obtain the ransom and Estrella for themselves (and no doubt all of the two captains' other treasure, too). Captain Beauregard and the crew of the *Atocha*, aided by Captain Delgado's crew, finally manage to fight off the bloodthirsty corsairs, who flee back to their ship and set sail for parts unknown.

Grateful for Captain Beauregard saving him and his daughter (for Ironface would surely have killed them), Captain Delgado tells Captain Beauregard he's heard a rumor that Ironface plans to attack the ship *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, which soon departs New Spain for Europe laden with gold and silver. With this clue to guide him, Captain Beauregard pursues Ironface.

When he spots the pursuit, Ironface abandons his plan to proceed toward New Spain. He turns tail and sails through the Yucatan Channel and around Cuba to the Bahamas, where he has a secret haven on a tiny isle not far from Caicos Island. The *Atocha* follows him there, finds the haven and engages Ironface's men in a bloody land battle. After fending off Captain Beauregard's blade, Ironface escapes.

A survivor of the battle—who claims Ironface press-ganged him and that he never wished to serve with such a bloodthirsty crew—tells Captain Beauregard that the *Guadalupe's* gold was not Ironface's main target. Instead he wanted a sea-chest full of shipping documents providing clues about the course of the almost legendary ship *Falcon*, which the famed pirate Tredegar Jones supposedly waylaid and sank many years ago. Shortly after capturing, and hiding, the *Falcon's* treasure, Jones's ship foundered in shallow water and was destroyed by a Spanish naval galleon. Since then every Caribbean pirate has dreamed of finding the *Falcon's* gold.

Knowing how much good he could do with that treasure, and how much he would enjoy angering the Viceroy, Captain Beauregard sets out to take the *Guadalupe*. After a fierce battle, the *Atocha* captures its prize. To Captain Beauregard's delight, the Viceroy himself is aboard the ship! Following a few rounds of taunts and jibes, Captain Beauregard frees the *Guadalupe* to limp home to New Spain while he sets out in search of the *Falcon's* gold.

By reviewing the documents and making a few deductions, Captain Beauregard figures out where Tredegar Jones probably hid the *Falcon's* gold: on the tiny island of Magnolia Key in the Florida Keys. The *Atocha* immediately sets sail for Magnolia Key. Meanwhile, Viceroy Sepúlveda, intent on revenge and recovering the gold for himself, hires Ironface to kill Captain Beauregard.

The *Atocha* arrives at the island and drops anchor. Captain Beauregard and his men go ashore in small boats to recover the treasure. Just as they finish digging it up, Ironface and his men arrive! Captain Beauregard and his crew must defeat them in a ruthless ship battle followed by a bloody boarding action. Depending on the outcome of the fight, the *Atocha*

may escape fully laden with gold, or may have to fight one last battle to claim the ultimate prize: the *Falcon's* gold!

VICTORY CONDITIONS

Captain Beauregard and his crew must accomplish several goals to win this holonovel. They must keep Estrella Delgado-Albernaz safe while they hold her captive (the computer removes this condition if Estrella finally joins the crew). Beauregard must defeat, and if possible kill, the evil pirate Ironface, and foil the Viceroy's scheme to recover the *Falcon's* gold for himself. They must obtain the *Falcon's* gold. If Captain Beauregard and his crew meet any two goals but not the third, they win a partial victory.

The antagonists (primarily Ironface) have simpler goals. They must kill Captain Beauregard and all other characters portrayed by Crewmembers; if they achieve that, they win regardless of whether they obtain any gold. They must recover the *Falcon's* gold and as much other treasure as possible for themselves. Estrella counts as "treasure" for this purpose. In the event Captain Beauregard lives, but Ironface (or the Viceroy) gets the loot, the holonovel ends in a draw.

CHARACTERS' ABILITIES

To complete this adventure successfully, characters must wield a cutlass well, know how to sail a ship and have acrobatic or athletic skill to leap around the rigging. Characters without the Primitive Weaponry skill may use cutlasses untrained per the usual rules (*Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* core rulebook, page 121); the same applies to Acrobatics and Athletics.

Sailing a Spanish galleon poses more problems. The computer uses a standard deep play method, accessing the ship's records and finding out each character's skill with Flight Control. It equates that with an ability to guide the galleon properly. Assume Crewmembers have Vehicle Operation (Spanish Galleon) at a level equivalent to their Shipboard Systems (Flight Control) skill.

The text below notes other skill substitutions like this. In such cases, characters should receive bonuses to their rolls if they roleplay the skill well—using naval terminology and period jargon and remaining "in character" at all times. You can also encourage characters to "swashbuckle"—swing from chandeliers, take on three opponents with a confident laugh and a gleam in their eye—by awarding positive modifiers to Tests for appropriate behavior, or allowing such actions to succeed automatically.

LIFE ON THE SPANISH MAIN

Since this holonovel takes place during the Golden Age of Piracy on Earth, a few words about the setting, equipment and customs of the era can help you run

OL' PEG-LEG

One of the staples of pirate adventures is the old pirate who's lost the lower half of one of his legs in some misadventure and now walks with a peg-leg. The loss of a limb is a relatively rare occurrence with 24th century medicine, so the odds of getting a "natural" one-legged person in this scenario are slim. However, if a character volunteers to play a peg-legged character, the holodeck computer can simulate the situation with a hologram and a special tractor beam to partially immobilize the "lost" leg. Since this equates with a -2 Physical Impairment (Missing Limb) Disadvantage, the volunteer receives two "phantom Development Points" which he can spend to increase his attributes or skills solely for the purposes of this holonovel. Only one character can volunteer to have a peg-leg.

the episode. Since the holonovel roles would know all of this information, you should allow players to read this section, too, as a PADD briefing.

THE CARIBBEAN

The action in this holonovel takes place in the Caribbean. Have at least one good map of the region available as you run the episode. Any good atlas should have one, and several gaming products related to pirates also include maps.

The Spanish control most of this region, including New Spain (what we call Mexico and Central America) and the Spanish Main proper (the northern coast of South America, divided, from west to east, into New Grenada and New Andalusia). The vast amount of gold, silver and other wealth they take from their New World colonies and ship back to Spain.

These shipments attract pirates, buccaneers, and corsairs of every stripe and nationality. They use the numerous islands in the area as havens and ports from which they strike at the slow-moving, heavily-laden Spanish galleons. The navies of Spain, France and Great Britain hunt pirates down, but with their masterful knowledge of the region's waters, the pirates often escape pursuit.

The four largest islands in the Caribbean are, from east to west, Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola (which today includes the nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and Puerto Rico. Sailors call these islands, and several smaller ones nearby, the Greater Antilles. To their east lie the Lesser Antilles, which curve south from the eastern tip of Puerto Rico down toward South America. Two small island chains, the Leeward Islands (including St. Maarten, St. Kitts, Barbuda, Montserrat and Antigua) and the Windward Islands (including Dominica, Martinique, St. Lucia and Grenada), compose the Lesser Antilles.

North of Cuba lie the Bahamas, a long chain of islands including Grand Bahama, Eleuthera, Mayaguana, Caicos Island and Turk's Island. Few pirates sail north of the Bahamas.

PORT ROYAL

Located on the southeast coast of the island of Jamaica, Port Royal, with 7,500 residents and 5,000 soldiers, is the largest English settlement in the Caribbean. It's also the most notorious pirate haven on the Spanish Main. Governor Thomas Modyford readily grants Letters of Marque and Reprisal to any pirate who agrees not to attack English ships. Since he tolerates the presence of pirates in his town, the place swarms with buccaneers of every description. It's a wild and woolly frontier town where one can buy just about anything, if you have enough money. Outsiders call it "the wickedest town on Earth" with good reason.

PIRATE EQUIPMENT

The holodeck creates a wide variety of "authentic" pirate weapons and equipment for the Crew's use during the novel.

BLADES AND BELAYING PINS

Cutlasses, daggers, and belaying pins use the statistics for sword, knife, and club (*Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game*, pages 237-38). Characters can get away with using favorite native weapons, such as the *chaka* or *mek'leth*, if they wish.

FIREARMS

Pirates of the period used a variety of flintlock pistols and guns. This requires the Projectile Weapon skill. Since characters cannot normally use this skill untrained, you might allow untrained use of firearms for purposes of this holonovel only. Or, substitute the character's Energy Weapon skill with a +2 Difficulty modifier (due to the gun's recoil). Some Narrators may allow Crewmembers to develop a Projectile Weapon (Flintlock) skill, as a result of holographic practice.

Normally a ship's master-of-arms stores all personal firearms in the ship's arms locker. A ship's crew uses pistols and rifles to repel boarders, when boarding

PIRATE FIREARMS TABLE

Firearm	Range	Damage	Reload
Flintlock Blunderbuss	5/8/15/30	3+4d6	2
Flintlock Musket	5/10/25/50	2+3d6	2
Flintlock Pistol	5/10/20/40	2+2d6	3
Flintlock Pocket Pistol	5/8/12/25	1+1d6	4
Matchlock Musket	5/10/20/40	2+2d6	3

"Reload" indicates the number of rounds it takes to reload the firearm after firing. Some characters carry prepared loads of shot and powder in small wooden canisters; using these reduces the Reload time by 1 round.

another ship and sometimes even in fights ashore. The accompanying table provides relevant information about the most common firearms available.

SHIPS AND SHIP COMBAT

Every pirate story features ships and battles between them. These quick and easy rules simulate these engagements in your pirate holonovel.

SHIP ATTRIBUTES

All ships have four Attributes: *Hull*; *Speed*; *Crew*; and *Cannon*.

Hull has two aspects: *Hull Durability*, and *Hull Points*. *Hull Durability* represents the hull's capacity to absorb damage—its "armor." *Hull Points* correspond to *Structural Points* on a starship; when damage eliminates all of a ship's *Hull Points*, the ship is destroyed.

Speed represents the ship's average speed in knots, assuming a good wind. Stronger or weaker winds can alter a ship's *Speed* proportionately. A ship may reduce its *Speed* by trimming its sails. Piling on extra sail can increase *Speed* by up to 25%, but runs the risk of causing damage to the rigging. Every hour a

PIRATE SHIPS

Type of Ship	Hull Dur.	Hull Points	Speed	Crew
Galleon	2	150	6	300
<i>Cannons:</i>	Heavy: 5 port, 5 starboard, 2 fore, 4 aft Medium: 5 port, 5 starboard Light: 5 port, 5 starboard Swivel: 3 aft starboard, 3 aft port, 3 forward starboard, 3 forward port			
Pinnace	2	130	8	180
<i>Cannons:</i>	Heavy: 3 port, 3 starboard Medium: 5 port, 5 starboard, 2 fore, 2 aft Light: 5 port, 5 starboard Swivel: 2 aft starboard, 2 aft port, 3 forward starboard, 3 forward port			
West Indiaman	2	120	7	150
<i>Cannons:</i>	Heavy: 3 port, 3 starboard Medium: 5 port, 5 starboard, 2 fore, 2 aft Light: 5 port, 5 starboard Swivel: 2 aft starboard, 2 aft port, 2 forward starboard, 3 forward port			
Flute	2	105	5	140
<i>Cannons:</i>	Heavy: 3 port, 3 starboard Medium: 3 port, 3 starboard, 2 fore, 2 aft Light: 3 port, 3 starboard Swivel: 2 aft starboard, 2 aft port, 3 forward starboard, 3 forward port			

CANNON TABLE

Type	Crew	Range	Damage
Swivel Gun	2	10/20/30/45	2+1d6
Light Cannon	2	10/20/40/80	4+2d6
Medium Cannon	3	10/25/50/100	6+2d6
Heavy Cannon	4	10/30/60/120	10+3d6

Crew: For every man fewer than the required *Crew* for a cannon, increase the *Difficulty* of all *Tests* to hit targets by +1.

Damage: Damage does not correlate to personal weapon damage ratings. Any individual character hit with a shot from any cannon dies or, at best, is crippled for life. Conversely, personal weapons such as cutlasses and flintlocks cannot cause damage to ships.

ship uses extra sail, make a Moderate (7) *Test* using the captain's *Shipboard Systems* (Flight Control) skill. Failure indicates the rigging takes 1d6 damage, and the crew may not use extra sail until the next day.

Crew indicates the size of the ship's crew (including the captain and other officers). The ship can carry an additional number of passengers or extra crewmen equal to 25% of this figure, but this strains the ship's food, water and space resources.

Cannon represents the ship's armament. Cannon includes both the type, number and size of cannon carried. Cannons come in two types: "regular" cannons (those with barrels mounted in wooden carriages which can only fire straight out from the ship in the direction they're pointed) and "swivel" cannons (smaller cannons mounted on pivots covering a broad arc of fire). A cannon's size determines the damage it causes—but the more damage it causes, the heavier the powder and shot needed to use it).

INITIATIVE AND MOVEMENT

Ships determine combat initiative with the captain's *Starship Tactics* skill. Since few characters possess any actual ability with wet navy tactics, the holodeck computer translates their skill at handling a starship (represented by their *Starship Tactics* skill level). Eventually, *Crewmembers* can develop skill in *Naval Tactics*.

During combat, divide the battlefield into *Movement Units*. Each *Movement Unit* represents 20 meters. Ships can move two *Movement Units* per round for every full knot of *Speed* they maintain. Thus, a ship moving at six knots moves up to 12 *Movement Units*. Since ships rarely maintain high *Speeds* in combat, they tend to move slowly during battles.

GRAPPLING

When two ships move close to each other, one may try to grapple—attach itself to the other ship with hooked ropes. This requires an *Opposed Command*

SHIP HIT LOCATIONS

Result (1d6)	Modifier	Effect
1-2 Rigging	+4	Every six points of damage inflicted on the Rigging reduces the ship's Speed by 1. When the ship reaches 0 Speed, it can only move if towed or rowed.
3-5 Hull, above waterline	+4	Subtract Hull Durability and apply remaining damage to Hull Points. Roll 1d6; on a 5-6 the attack destroys one enemy cannon. Roll a second 1d6; on a 4-6, the attack kills 2-12 crewmen.
6 Hull, below waterline	+8	Subtract Hull Durability and apply remaining damage to Hull Points. Consult sinking rules.

Test between the commanding officers of the two ships; if the attacker succeeds, his crew lashes the vessels together. The crew can now swing or jump over to the other ship and engage its crew. If he fails, the other ship repulses the grappling attempt.

CANNON FIRE

To attack another vessel, a ship must close within range. The captain chooses how many cannons to fire. A team must operate each cannon; the Cannon Table on the previous page indicates the team size for each type of gun.

If a Crewmember participates in a cannon team, assume he commands that team and use his Shipboard Systems (Tactical) skill to determine whether the shot hits its target. Over time, an aficionado of pirate stories or Horatio Hornblower simulations can develop a skill in Naval Systems (Cannon). For teams composed completely of Supporting Cast characters, simply assign them a "Cannoneering" rating of 1 to 3 and roll that many dice to determine whether their shot hits its intended target.

A team can only fire a cannon once every three rounds; it uses the other two rounds to reload. A character who makes a Moderate (7) Command (Combat Leadership) Test might reduce the reloading time to one round.

Failure on a cannon shot simply indicates a miss. A Dramatic Failure causes the cannon to explode, doing its rated damage in a Blast Radius of 3 meters, with a Dropoff of 5 points per 1 meter beyond that (see the *ST: TNG RPG Players' Guide*). This explosion also damages the ship, of course, typically causing an unpleasant, gaping hole in the side of the vessel.

HITTING AND DAMAGE

If the Test made when firing a cannon indicates success, the shot hits the target. Use the accompanying Ship Hit Locations Table to determine where the shot hit. Cannon teams may aim at any of these locations, but doing so imposes the listed Difficulty Modifier on the shot.

If a ship takes damage below its waterline (whether from cannon fire, hitting a sandbar or an explosion in the hold), it takes on water and starts sinking. A ship may take on a number of Water Units equal to its Hull Points when fully repaired. When holed beneath the waterline, it takes on a number of Water Units per round equal to the points of damage suffered below the waterline. For example, if a flute (105 Hull Points) takes 15 points of damage below the waterline due to a cannon shot, it takes on 15 Water Units of water per round. When it takes on 105 Units, it sinks.

Of course the crew of the damaged ship won't just let it sink. They can use buckets, the ship's pumps and other means to bail out the water. It takes two men to bail one Water Unit out of the ship per round. The Narrator may limit the number of men who can bail in a given area at any time; after all, you can't fit 20 men into a tiny cargo hold.

REPAIRING THE SHIP

The ship's carpenter and sailmaker and their assistants must work hard in battle to repair damage before it threatens the integrity or capabilities of the ship. Use the character's Material Engineering skill to determine how easily they implement repairs. History buffs who spend a great deal of time in this and similar simulations could eventually pick up the skill Material Engineering (Carpentry). The Difficulty for repairs depends upon the damage's extent, per the accompanying table.

Each round three men can repair 1 point of damage, +1 point for every two points by which the carpenter (or sailmaker) made his repair Test. The more men devoted to repair detail, the quicker the vessel becomes "shipshape" once again—but the fewer men there are to fire cannons, repel boarders, and run the ship. Keep in mind that a vessel can only carry so much extra lumber, canvas, and other supplies, so eventually the ship will sink if it keeps taking damage, regardless of the carpenter's Test Results.

SHIP REPAIRS TABLE

Points of Damage	Repair Difficulty
1-10	Routine (4)
11-20	Moderate (7)
21-30	Challenging (10)
31-40	Difficult (13)
41+	Near Impossible (15)



CHAPTER ONE: CAPTAIN DELGADO'S TREASURE

"Port cannons—fire!" cries Captain Beauregard.

The Falcon's Gold opens right in the thick of things—a battle between the *Atocha* and a merchant vessel, the *Esmerelda*, a flute out of New Grenada bound for Spain. The *Atocha* spotted her a few hours ago, gave chase and brought her to bay. This scene gives characters experience fighting pirate battles at sea, introduces an important NPC (Estrella Delgado-Albernaz) and forms a foundation upon which the rest of the story builds.

To create the intense atmosphere for your players, describe the setting and action lushly. Gunpowder smoke fills the air, cannons roar, blood-red sea-water washes the decks, men scream curses across the water, shining blades clash! Encourage the players to "play up" their characters' actions in a grand, swash-buckling fashion.

The *Atocha* and the *Esmerelda* begin the battle five Movement Units apart. Because the *Atocha* faster and better armed, Beauregard eventually wins the battle. Run the engagement for at least a few rounds to give players a feel for the ship rules—give them a chance to practice for later encounters. Get some idea of which Crewmembers take on the different duties aboard the *Atocha*.

Ask various characters for rolls using their ship-board skills to maneuver the galley, repair damage, and fire the cannon. Once the flute takes a good pounding (but not enough to sink or irreparably damage it) the *Esmerelda* sends up a flag of surrender. Captain Beauregard, a merciful and honorable man, should cease fire and bring the *Atocha* close for boarding.

When Captain Beauregard boards the *Esmerelda*, Captain Delgado greets him with a look of angered resignation on his face. A reasonably handsome man of middle years, Captain Delgado wears sturdy clothing well-suited to a long sea journey rather than the foppish clothes favored by some merchants. He acknowledges Captain Beauregard's supremacy over the *Esmerelda*, but clearly dislikes surrendering to anyone. When the opportunity arises, he requests medical assistance for his injured men.

ESTRELLA

Captain Beauregard's crew undoubtedly searches the *Esmerelda* for loot. Most of its cargo consists of raw ore, bales of cotton and cacao, and other materials not really suited for pirate treasure. With a successful Moderate (7) Search Test, the most diligent searchers find three chests, two containing gold doubloons and pieces of eight, and the other small bars of silver. They begin systematically transferring the loot to the *Atocha*.

The most important find of all, though, is not gold or silver, but something far more beautiful—Captain Delgado's lovely daughter, Estrella Delgado-Albernaz. With her long black hair, porcelain complexion, flashing brown eyes and perfect figure, she presents a picture of feminine charm many of the *Atocha's* old salts have never seen. She wears fine, though not delicate, clothing the color of lavender. The fright in her eyes and the smoke, soot and dust on her clothing make her seem all the more beautiful.

(At this point, a player who chose Estrella as a character begins playing her. Provide her description and background in advance, so the player can step into the role right away and start interacting with the other characters.)

Possibly enchanted by her beauty, Captain Beauregard should take Estrella hostage, as is the common practice of the time—her father obviously has money to easily ransom her. If the player doesn't get this idea on his own, Captain Delgado provides the hint: "I suppose you will now take my daughter hostage, you scoundrel..." or a mob of NPC pirate crew suggest taking her for ransom.

After Estrella is "escorted" to Captain Beauregard's cabin on the *Atocha*, Captain Delgado asks for assurances that his daughter will not be "harmed" or "sullied" in any way—assurances Captain Beauregard should give and keep. Captain Beauregard should also give terms of ransom to Captain Delgado. The typical ransom would be about a thousand pieces of eight, and Delgado should receive at least a month to get the money together. The standard meeting place for such transfers is the Zaragosa Tavern in the infamous city of Port Royal. Rabican d'Orleans, if played by the computer, can provide this kind of information, or may participate in the "negotiations" for the ransom. Barring that, a fan of pirate lore might make a History or Knowledge (17th century Pirates) Skill Test.

Troubleshooting: Despite all hints and suggestions, the player running Beauregard may feel the good captain would not take a beautiful young woman hostage. If so, this presents a minor problem you can

easily overcome. Since the next pivotal scene occurs in a tavern in Port Royal, simply send the *Atocha* to Port Royal and have Ironface attack Captain Beauregard and his crew on general principles. Jump ahead to "Chapter Three: Zaragosa Brawl," then proceed with the standard plot, altering it as necessary.

Captain Beauregard may prefer other terms for Estrella's ransom. Other amounts of money or goods, within reason, pose no problem. Suggesting a meeting place other than Port Royal does—it's unlikely Ironface will encounter Captain Beauregard anywhere else and have an opportunity to attack him. If necessary, hint that Port Royal constitutes the accepted venue for such exchanges. Perhaps you can enlist another character to pressure the captain to make the exchange at Port Royal, like Delgado. Since pirate ships like the *Atocha* are democratically run (within certain bounds), the crew might vote to complete the transfer at Port Royal and overrule Captain Beauregard if absolutely necessary.

CHAPTER TWO: IDLE DAYS ABOARD THE ATOCHA

This chapter allows players to become comfortable with their characters' roles and personalize them—perhaps delighting in a bit of raiding, practicing skills appropriate to the setting, or similarly reveling in the pirate's life. The Narrator should devise several appropriate scenes, if the Crewmembers so desire. Otherwise, the Crewmembers can order the computer to speed through the month. The length of this chapter depends upon your players' desires. Some may not wish to spend much time on it, others might find it fascinating. Choose the emphasis and approach which is likely to work best for you. The computer keeps track of the month's passing, so that Crewmembers can pick up where they leave off.

During this time the *Atocha* can sail wherever Captain Beauregard or the crew wishes. They may even head to Port Royal early to revel in the haven's raucous environment. If your players enjoy their time as pirates, you might throw a random encounter into the mix—a merchant ship to plunder or a Spanish man-o'-war to run from. There's plenty of drama and excitement to come, though, so don't tire the players out too soon.

CANDLELIGHT AND WINE

In keeping with Captain Beauregard's order, Estrella retires to his cabin (after a crewman removes any weapons or dangerous objects). Etiquette demands Beauregard find accommodations elsewhere, surrendering his cabin to a lady. A crewman (usually someone big and burly) guards the cabin door at all times. Although the pirates treat her politely, even respectfully, they expect her to return the favor and remain quiet.



During this chapter, Captain Beauregard and Estrella begin developing an attraction for each other. She seeks him out—naturally so, as he is an educated man—to discuss literature and trade *bon mots*. In keeping with the genre, Captain Beauregard's heart should kindle hopes of a different sort. But romance between player characters is always difficult to engineer, even to forward the plot. If Estrella is a PC, then you can skip over this scene, or substitute something altogether different—Estrella and Beauregard can spend the month squaring off. Who knows? Romance may bloom anyway.

On the other hand, if Estrella is a holographic persona, she can pursue him, even if Beauregard's player doesn't have romance on his mind. Though Beauregard may not harbor amorous desires, Estrella certainly does; attracted to the rakish pirate since the first moment their eyes met, Estrella plans to win his heart. That first night, have Estrella comment to Beauregard on his poor manners—"is it not customary for the captain to dine with his guests?" she goads. Continue in this vein until Captain Beauregard relents, and invites her to dinner.

To that end, he can arrange for a private dinner between the two of them in his cabin. According to strict social conventions, it isn't "proper" for them to spend time unchaperoned—and Beauregard can arrange for one of the other Crewmembers to attend; this shouldn't hamper the subtle flirtations traded across the table, and the Crewmember can always make his apologies and return to duty. Captain Beauregard may, if he wishes, go so far as to dip into the ship's small store of fine wine, or even stop at a small island somewhere and try to obtain fresh game or fish for the meal.

Estrella's reaction depends upon whether a player's character takes her role. If so, the player decides her response to these "advances" from Captain Beauregard. She may consider them flattering and respond in kind—the Captain is, after all, quite handsome and dashing himself, and for a pirate enjoys a relatively good reputation (one she's finding accurate). Estrella may try to manipulate him, playing him along in the hopes of somehow arranging an escape or even a "pity release." Or she may even try to join the crew.

If Estrella's just an NPC, she reacts to Captain Beauregard as if mildly insulted he would think to "seduce" her while holding her hostage. She should be, at turns, encouraging and standoffish. Still, the more he keeps devoting attention to her, the more likely she warms to him—roleplay the attraction as you see fit.

If multiple players participate in this holonovel, they may compete for the fair Esmerelda's hand. Captain Beauregard certainly shouldn't make anyone walk the plank for trying to charm the beautiful young lady. If possible, have the players roleplay this competition; watching them try to "one-up" each other to impress her can be a lot of fun. To speed play or resolve awkward situations, you may let them resort

to Charm (Seduction), Persuasion, or other Tests to determine with whom she's most taken.

Troubleshooting: Not all players enjoy roleplaying extended social interaction, especially the kind with possible romantic overtones. If Captain Beauregard's or Estrella's players feel that way, skip this encounter altogether. This fun interlude isn't crucial to the plot development. Alternately, you can substitute some other roleplaying-oriented scene, such as a contest or game between two or more characters. This will help balance out the more combat- or action-oriented chapters which fill the rest of the holonovel.

CHAPTER THREE: ZARAGOSA BRAWL

After the appropriate amount of time passes, the *Atocha* sets sail for Jamaica and the town of Port Royal. Unless you prefer to inject a little excitement into the voyage—such as a sudden squall the ship must weather—Captain Beauregard, his crew, and their hostage arrive in Port Royal without difficulty.

Captain Beauregard and most of his crew go ashore with Estrella in tow. The majority of the crewmen are just taking "shore leave." Only the player characters attend the hostage exchange, along with a few NPC crewmen as bodyguards (essentially "red-shirts" for the coming fight).

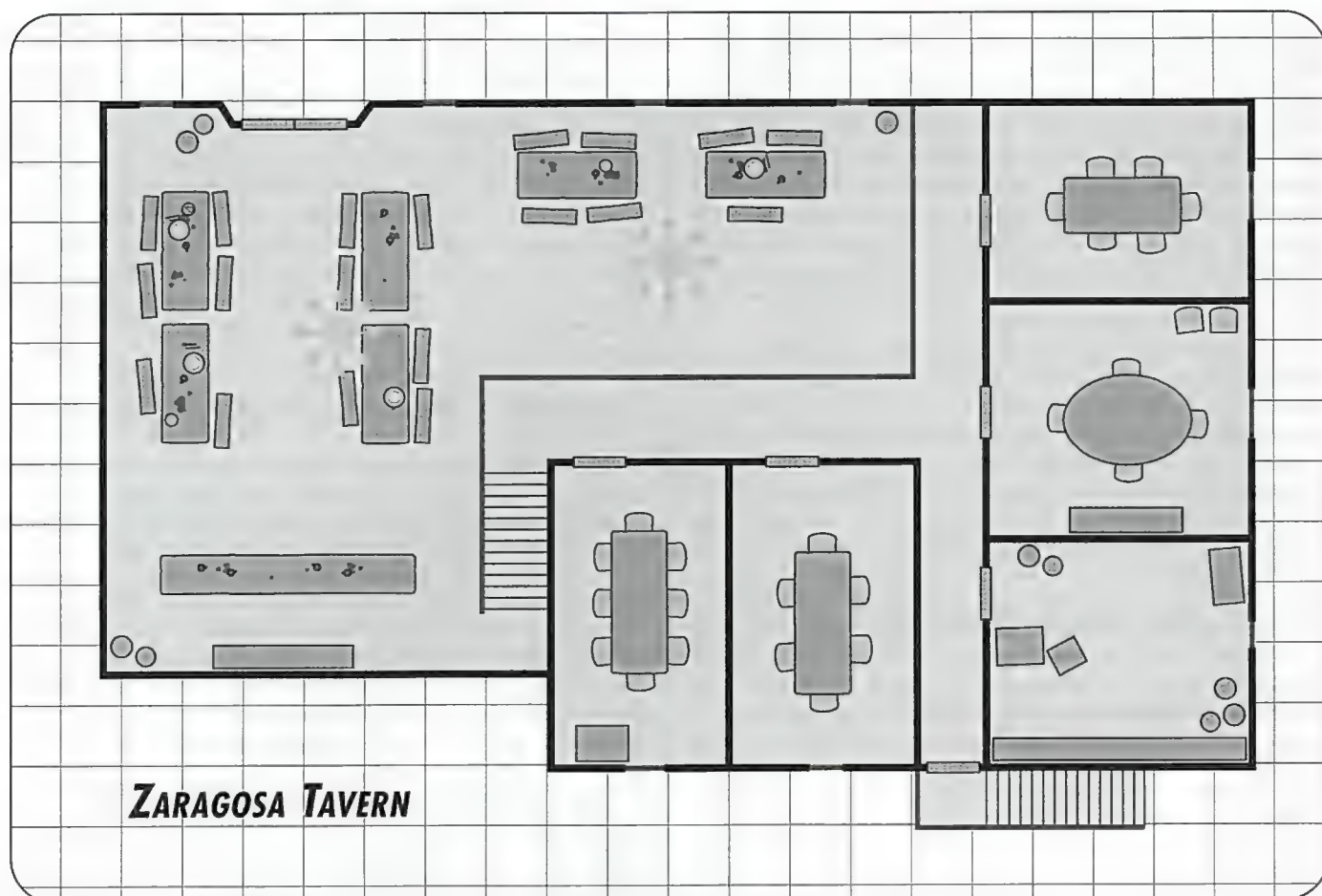
The exchange takes place at the Zaragosa, a tavern not too far from the waterfront, but not too close, either. If the players chose some other location, that's fine, as long as it's one where Ironface and his men can burst in on them and start trouble.

The Zaragosa is a nice place, as taverns in Port Royal go. Built of sturdy wood to withstand fierce tropical storms, it has a high roof and a dim, smoky interior. Several large wooden chandeliers—hung from the ceiling by black iron chains—provide most of the light, though a fireplace along one wall also dispels the gloom when the weather's cold enough for a fire. Various nautical paraphernalia decorates the walls.

Rough wooden tables fill most of the floor. Candles light some, and virtually every table shows scars from past knife and sword fights. A bar stands along one wall; the owner of the Zaragosa, an expatriate Frenchman, Emil d'Plessy, holds court behind it. Anyone who wants beer, rum, whiskey or other beverages need only approach the bar and hand over enough coin.

Beauregard and his crew can ask d'Plessy if he's seen Captain Delgado, which he answers by indicating stairs not far from the bar running along one wall to the second story. Captain Delgado reserved the room nearest the second floor landing—a private meeting room with no windows—for the hostage exchange. There he awaits Captain Beauregard with two burly, well-armed sailors to carry the ransom and protect his coin and person.

Intended to be a room where guests flush with gold can dine privately, the furnishings consists of a long, polished table and padded chairs more fit for a



wealthy merchant than sea dogs. Delgado sits at the head of the table, a bottle of wine before him, the two seamen standing by his chair. Unless the players do something foolish or hotheaded, the meeting goes well at first.

Captain Delgado is extremely grateful to get his daughter back unharmed. Estrella confirms Captain Beauregard and his crew did not mistreat her (or, if someone's playing her now, she informs him he can keep the ransom, because she decided to join the crew).

The situation soon degenerates, but through no fault of Delgado or Beauregard. A new element—the evil pirate captain Ironface, Captain Beauregard's sworn enemy—enters the picture. He and his men saw Beauregard and his crew entering the Zaragosa with their hostage, figured out what was going on, and decided to snatch both hostage and ransom for their own, possibly killing Captain Beauregard as well.

Before the two captains complete their transaction, Ironface and his men smash their way into the room, cutlasses drawn. Years moving heavy cargoes under the blazing tropical sun fortified Ironface's body, as shown by his deeply tanned skin and corded muscles. He wears typical pirate garb and carries a knife, flintlock pistol and cutlass. A dozen scars and gray burns from smoke and powder explosions cover his face.

His men, scurvy dogs all, aren't much more handsome, but clearly Ironface poses more danger than any of his swabbies.

"Your luck's run out now, Beauregard," Ironface says with a wicked smile. "There's nowhere to run, and you're outnumbered. Surrender the girl and the gold to me now and I promise you a quick death!"

Ironface has a straightforward goal: kill Captain Beauregard (and Captain Delgado, too, if he can), collect the ransom money, and abduct Estrella for himself. Captain Beauregard must protect Estrella (as he's honorbound to do until he and Captain Delgado complete the exchange), escape with his life and kill Ironface if possible. There's no mystery or ambiguity about the rest of this encounter—just a good, swash-buckling sword fight.

Ironface wasn't lying when he claimed he trapped and outnumbered Captain Beauregard and his men, though Captain Delgado and his guards even the odds a bit. Captain Beauregard and the other Crewmember characters must fight their way out of the meeting room. Their best bet is to attack quickly and fiercely to force Ironface and his men out of the room and down the stairs. Let several crewmen, especially Rabican and Sevastopol, shine here with their fighting talents.

Once he gets to the stairway landing, Captain Beauregard's situation improves. With successful Acrobatics Skill Tests, he can leap onto the bar, grab a

IRONFACE

Role: Antagonist

Type: Rival

Backstory: Raised by a poor family in Port Royal, Ironface ran off to sea when he was only twelve. Thanks to his ruthlessness, he soon rose through the pirate ranks, eventually taking command of his own ship.

Demeanor: Vicious, cruel, depraved, tyrannical to those under his command.

Goals: Kill Beauregard, capture and loot ships, satisfy his lust for gold.

Costume: Ironface's clothing is at odds with his cruel behavior. He dresses in fine, tailored shirts and colorful, embroidered coats.

Fitness: 4

Strength +1

Vitality +1

Coordination: 3

Reaction +2

Intellect: 2

Presence: 4

Willpower +1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Acrobatics (Swinging) 2 (3), Command (Pirate Vessel) 4 (5), Culture (Pirate) 2 (3), Dodge 3, Intimidation (Torture) 1 (2), Planetside Survival (Tropical) 2 (3), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) 3 (4), Projectile Weapons (Flintlock Pistol) 2 (3), Languages -Spanish 1, Streetwise (Port Royal) 3 (4), Vehicle Operation (Galleon) 3 (4)

Special Skills: Ship Tactics (Spanish) 3 (4), Shipboard Systems (Cannon) 2 (3),

Traits: High Pain Threshold +2, Toughness +2, Bloodlust -2, Greedy, -1, Sworn Enemy (Beauregard) -1

Resistance: 5

Wound Levels: 6/6/6/6/6/0

chandelier and swing out into the room, and use the tavern's open space to his advantage. (Faint-hearted participants shouldn't worry about such high-flying acrobatics. Such is the life of a pirate, according to historical records. The holodeck works to reinforce these genre conventions by altering the room's gravity and supporting participants with light tractor beams. The worst a character should suffer in a fall is a bruised ego. Ignore the results of Dramatic Failures).

The entire Zaragosa bar soon becomes one swirling melee as other pirates join in the "fun." Encourage the characters to jump up on tables, use bottles and other miscellaneous objects to help defeat their opponents, and otherwise fight with zest. If possible, arrange a scene where the character who's beginning to win Estrella's heart must put his own life at risk to save her—perhaps by grabbing her and

swinging from a chandelier to safety over the raised cutlasses of Ironface's crew.

Ironface eventually realizes his scheme has failed, after six rounds of combat. He and his men flee, possibly starting a fire in the tavern to cover their escape. You must keep Captain Beauregard and his men from following them right away. If necessary, wound someone they would want to take care of right away (such as Estrella) or remind them they still haven't collected the ransom from Captain Delgado.

If Captain Beauregard and his men try to pursue Ironface and his crew right away, you must delay them long enough for Ironface to get a head start for the subsequent chase at sea. Some possible delaying tactics include a gang of thugs hired by Ironface attacks the crew for a few rounds; a wagon pulls out into the street between Ironface's band and Captain Beauregard's men; or a group of the Governor's soldiers, responding to the brawl, detains Captain Beauregard and his crew for a few minutes.

If worse comes to worst, Ironface and his men get into a launch and start rowing out to their ship before the characters get to the docks. Captain Beauregard and his crew can get into their own launches and head for their own vessel, only to find out that Ironface's crew has sabotaged it. The ship's carpenter must spend a couple of hours making repairs before Captain Beauregard can give chase to Ironface's ship, now fading on the horizon. If Captain Beauregard tries to row out to Ironface's ship, a volley of musket fire prevents him from approaching.

IRONFACE'S PIRATES

Role: Antagonist

Type: Supporting Character

Backstory: These scurvy pirates joined their master to escape the law or their former lives, hoping for greater excitement and wealth terrorizing others on the high seas.

Demeanor: Wicked, bloodthirsty scoundrels

Goals: Capture and loot ships. Fight the captain's enemies. Carouse and go wenching in Port Royal.

Costume: Various sailors' clothes.

Fitness: 2

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 2

Presence: 2

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Acrobatics (Swinging) 1 (2), Dodge 1, Intimidation (Torture) 1 (2), Planetside Survival (Tropical) 1 (2), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) 1 (2), Projectile Weapon (Gunpowder Rifle) 1 (2), Stealth (Stealthy Movement) 1 (2), Streetwise (Port Royal) 2 (3), Vehicle Operation (Galleon) 1 (2)

Resistance: 2

Wound Levels: 2/2/2/2/2/0



Troubleshooting: While it's possible Captain Beauregard could "die" in the barroom swordfight, this should have no lasting effects on the outcome of this holonovel. On the holodeck, it's impossible for a Crewmember's persona to suffer the ultimate fate. If the dice dictate Captain Beauregard—or any other player character, for that matter—should perish, the Crew can always restart the program at the beginning of the scene. That's what makes holodecks so much fun.

CHAPTER FOUR: PURSUIT

During the fight at the Zaragosa, Captain Delgado suffers a wound, but not a bad one (unless the Narrator wishes to fatally injure him for dramatic purposes—perhaps to provide Estrella with a motivation for joining the *Atocha's* crew). One of the holographic Supporting Cast characters finds Captain Beauregard, and gives him the news. Rushing back to the room, the Crew finds Delgado sitting in a chair, holding a handkerchief to his injured bicep to stem the flow of blood (or, if he's more seriously wounded, he lies on the dining table, having been placed there by his crew).

If Doctor Montgomery is not among the Crew, a surgeon arrives to treat Delgado (perhaps summoned by d'Plessy, one of Delgado's crew, or one of the PCs; it doesn't matter—he's part of the program). Captain Delgado finds himself willing to trust the dashing pirate captain. He saw how Captain Beauregard and his crew risked their own lives to save Estrella instead of simply palming her off on her father and taking the gold. Grimacing in pain as a surgeon treats his wounds, Delgado motions Captain Beauregard closer.

"I know your feud with Ironface stretches back many years, Captain," he says. "I saw how you risked your life to save my daughter, so in gratitude I will tell you of a rumor I heard recently. Soon the ship *Nuestra Señorade Guadalupe* departs New Spain from the port of Veracruz, laden with gold and silver for the King's coffers in Madrid. Ironface strongly desires this prize, so if you wish to pursue him, sail towards Veracruz. With favorable winds I'm sure you can catch him and obtain the vengeance you so richly deserve." If pressed for more, Captain Delgado begins coughing, and the surgeon waves Captain Beauregard away from the injured man.

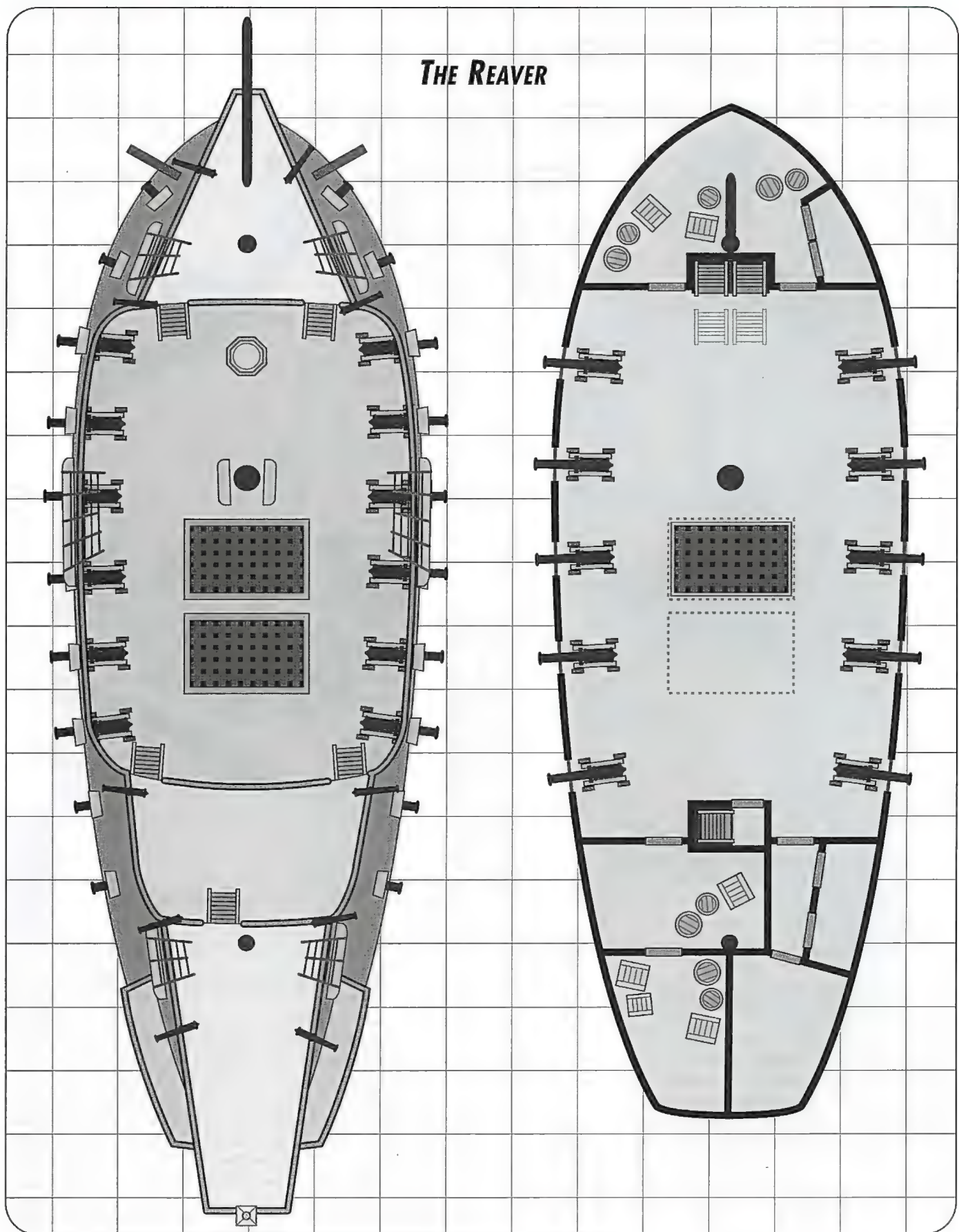
Now that he knows which way Ironface sailed, Captain Beauregard can give the proper directions to Alexander Sevastopol. By the time the *Atocha* gets underway, Ironface's ship should have sailed away from Port Royal—it may still be in sight on the horizon, or entirely lost to the *Atocha* crew, whichever feels more dramatic. Before long, though, the two ships sail within sight of each other, so Ironface realizes he has not left his enemy far behind.

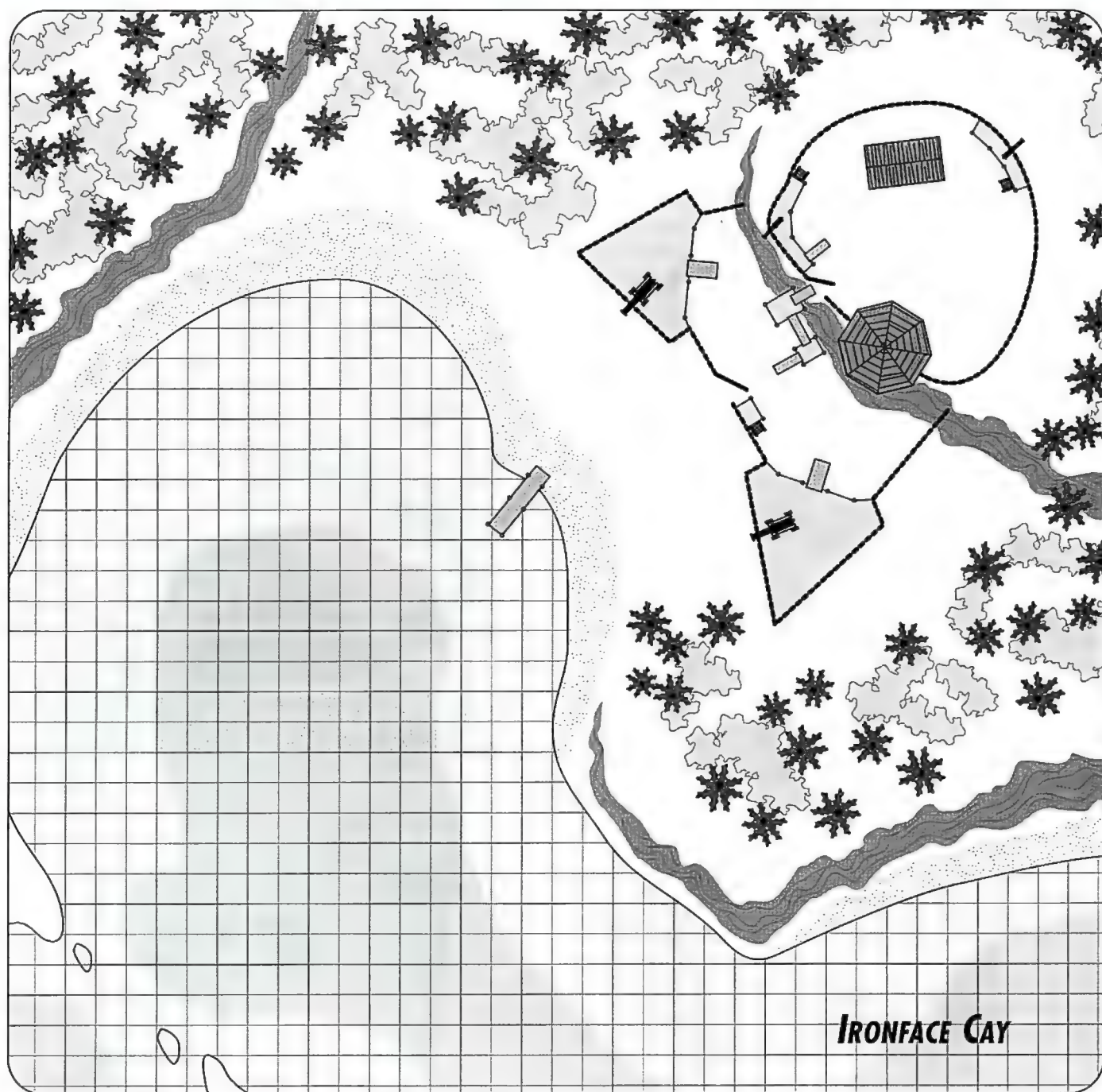
The crew must do some fancy sailing to catch up to Ironface. They need to pile on the sail (with the risks that entails), avoid the roughest waters and any navigation hazards, and pray Ironface doesn't get a good wind.

Ironface knows he cannot engage a Spanish treasure ship while the *Atocha* harasses him from behind. As Captain Beauregard and his crew get closer, he apparently abandons his plan and turns east once he passes through the Yucatan Channel. His new route takes him along the northern coast of Cuba toward the Bahamas, where he maintains a stronghold. He knows if he can reach that haven, his chances of withstanding Captain Beauregard's attack improve significantly.

This chapter ends in a tense chase scene. Ironface's ship, the *Reaver*, is a galleon just like the *Atocha*. The two ships are evenly matched, but the heroes can certainly catch up to Ironface with a little luck. If they get that luck too soon, the chase may end early. Instead of the attack described below, you can run a ship-to-ship battle between the two vessels.

The *Reaver* might also land on some deserted island where its crew can construct fortifications to resist the *Atocha*. Somehow make sure Ironface finds a way to escape so he can return for the holonovel's dramatic conclusion.

THE REAVER



CHAPTER FIVE: IRONFACE CAY

The chase climaxes at Ironface Cay, the notorious captain's secret haven in the Bahamas. You may have to delay Captain Beauregard's pursuit to make sure he doesn't catch up with Ironface too early. Piling on sail or sabotage might damage the *Atocha's* rigging; a warship could arrive, forcing the *Atocha* to veer away from the pursuit or take a slight detour; or stormy weather could sweep in, slowing the *Atocha*. Choose something dramatic and exciting based on the current state of the chase.

Don't delay the *Atocha* so much it completely loses the *Reaver*, however. If Ironface gets away entirely, Captain Beauregard won't have much chance of finding him. If that happens anyway, just let the *Atocha* turn around and go after the treasure ship—skip to Chapter Six.

Ironface should make it to his hideout just an hour or two ahead of the *Atocha* so his men can only make a few feverish preparations before their attackers arrive. The cay harbor is too shallow for a large ship land at the docks. The *Atocha* discovers the *Reaver* dropped off Ironface and most of his men and then sailed away into the archipelago. It could hide behind

any of a dozen small islands nearby—that's just what it's doing, but it won't have time to return to the cay to affect the battle.

A log-palisade fortress with several swivel guns and light cannons protects the docks. Provided the *Atocha* stays in the deeper waters, it remains out of guns' range—but the guns target the ship's boat. Captain Beauregard and his men use to row ashore. Give them a rough time as they row in, but don't kill anyone (except perhaps some NPCs, for effect) or prevent them from making it ashore.

Beauregard's pirates can always land elsewhere on the island and work their way toward the fort overland, but that exposes them to ambushes and other dangers. Once they land, Captain Beauregard and his men must storm the fort and find Ironface. Make sure the opposition at the fort gives them a tough fight without hacking them to pieces along the way. Built into a hillside, the fort contains many different parapets, platforms, and "levels"—perfect for daring, leap-filled swordfights. Throw in a few unexpected incidents to play up the swashbuckling feel: wooden platforms giving way, or characters slipping so they must hold on with one hand while desperately fencing with the other. The screams of men, the clash of swords and smoke from flintlocks fill the air.

Eventually Captain Beauregard (or another "lead" character) and Ironface meet and duel it out. Despite his foe's strong attack, Captain Beauregard should, slowly but surely, get the upper hand and begin forcing the scar-faced captain back. Then, through some devious trick—throwing sand in Beauregard's face or tripping him up with a trick board in a staircase—Ironface gains the means to escape. While Captain Beauregard deals with the distraction, Ironface somehow escapes to return and fight another day: ducking through a secret passageway, running down a stairway and through a door he shuts and locks behind him; or jumping over the parapet and fleeing into the jungle.

Troubleshooting: Circumstances, such as a lucky blow early on, may make it impossible for Ironface to escape this confrontation. If so, he certainly can't show up later to bedevil Captain Beauregard one last time. Instead, substitute a crew of privateers whom the Viceroy of New Spain commissions to find and destroy the *Atocha* and her crew.

CHAPTER SIX: A SURVIVOR'S TALE

After engaging Ironface's forces at the cay, the *Atocha* and her crew can pursue the *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*. Although this involves some conflict, it should develop the plot by providing Captain Beauregard and his crew with the clue they need to find the *Falcon's* gold.

After the fight at Ironface Cay, one of Ironface's wounded men asks to speak with Captain Beauregard. He's wearing a tattered military uniform of some sort and suffering from a bad cutlass wound in his side, but nevertheless seems very determined. He speaks in



polished Spanish. "My name is Rodrigo Marvillosa de Ochoa," he says huskily. "A year ago I was a member of His Majesty's navy, but I had the misfortune to be press-ganged by this band of cutthroats your men have just dispatched, and no chance for escape ever presented itself. For a year I have done penance in Ironface's man-made hell. A month ago I heard him speak of a ship, the *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, which we would soon pursue. You must stop him from taking that ship. He seeks not its gold, but the key to much greater riches. The *Guadalupe* carries documents regarding another ship, the *Halcón*, which he wishes to plunder."

This revelation immediately sparks interest in anyone who hears it, especially the crew. As every pirate in the Spanish Main knows, the *Halcón*, or *Falcon* in English, is a nigh-legendary treasure ship captured many years ago by the famed pirate Tredegar Jones. After he looted the vessel's dozens of chests of gold, silver, and jewels, he scuttled it and buried the treasure on a nearby island. Shortly thereafter Jones's ship foundered in shallow water, where a Spanish man-o'-war found it, sunk it, and killed every man aboard. Since then dreams of finding the lost treasure of the *Falcon* have filled talk in every Caribbean pirate haven.

Marvillosa continues: "It was Ironface's plan to take the *Guadalupe* and use those documents to find

the *Falcon's* treasure. He said Viceroy Sepúlveda told him about the documents in exchange for half of whatever he finds. You must stop them, or else they will use that treasure, the rightful property of the King of Spain, to increase their own selfish power." He answers any questions Captain Beauregard asks, but doesn't know where Ironface fled to or where the Reaver went.

Knowing how much evil Ironface and the Viceroy could inflict with the *Falcon's* wealth, and how much good he could do with it, Captain Beauregard should immediately set sail to intercept the *Guadalupe*. Marvillosa tells him where Ironface planned to catch it; the Viceroy told him exactly what route it would take. (The Viceroy enlisted Ironface's aid, rather than use his own soldiers, because the gold rightfully belongs to the King of Spain. If the Viceroy uses official means to get it, he won't be able to keep any for himself.)

CHAPTER SEVEN: OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

After a few days of sailing the *Atocha* encounters the *Guadalupe*, a West Indiaman. She rides low in the water, laden with cargo. The West Indiaman, well-armed for battle, fires her cannon at the *Atocha*. Puffs of gray smoke and angry blasts of fire erupt from the *Guadalupe's* gun ports. Water splashes violently as cannon balls land harmlessly in the water. A brief fight forces the vessel to surrender—in fact, the ship could have fought much harder.

When he boards the ship, Captain Beauregard discovers why it surrendered so quickly: the Viceroy of New Spain himself is aboard! A short, plump man wearing the most elegant clothes available and much jewelry, Viceroy Sepúlveda exhibits the arrogant, condescending manner of a man used to unquestioning obedience. His presence on the ship was part of the plan. Ironface was supposed to take him "hostage" along with the treasure and documents so they could complete their scheme. The presence of a pirate captain other than Ironface aboard the *Guadalupe* shocks the Viceroy—but he hides it so quickly that only Captain Beauregard or Rabican, at most, see it on a Moderate (6) Search Test or Intellect Test, modified by any Perception edge.

The Viceroy, who fancies himself a quick wit, tries to verbally jab and spar with Captain Beauregard and his crew, insulting them with biting words and unflattering comments. Roleplay this for all it's worth. If Captain Beauregard and his men cannot hold their own, the *Guadalupe's* crew laughs at them.

Meanwhile, members of Beauregard's crew search the *Guadalupe's* hold for treasure. Finding a few chests of gold coins poses no problems. With a successful Routine (5) Search Skill Test, one of the crewmembers—perhaps even a PC—discovers a sea chest full of documents in the Viceroy's quarters (the holographic sea dogs have Intellect 2 and Search 2).

The Viceroy, angry at Beauregard's discovery, can only sputter out threats. He promises Madrid will hunt Beauregard down for his impertinence. If this doesn't phase Beauregard, he threatens him with Ironface.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE TRAIL OF THE FALCON

Satisfied with this booty, Captain Beauregard should allow the *Guadalupe* to limp on home to Veracruz to lick its wounds. If the ship suffered too much damage to make it home, Captain Beauregard can take its crew onto his own vessel as prisoners, maroon them on the nearest large island, and alert the authorities where to find them at first opportunity.

With the documents from the *Guadalupe* in hand, Captain Beauregard can make pirate history by finding the fabulous *Falcon* hoard. Before he can do so he must meet Ironface for a climactic confrontation from which only one of them will emerge alive.

Captain Beauregard must analyze the documents taken from the *Guadalupe* to determine where the *Falcon* was going, where Tredegar Jones probably waylaid it, and the most likely location for the treasure's burial spot. Most importantly, he must assemble and decipher a partially-encoded map, then follow its



directions. Tredegar Jones hid the map by dividing it into eight pieces among his various documents and annotating it in a code of his own devising.

First, the Captain and crew must find the map. Because he has so many documents to work with, Beauregard must enlist the crew to help him find all eight pieces. Each person searching the documents can make a Moderate (7) Search Test. Success indicates the character found one piece; each two points above 7 indicates he found another piece. The characters find assembling the pieces difficult only if they don't have at least half of them. The Narrator may require them to make a Routine (5) Intellect Test to assemble the puzzle correctly.

Now they must figure out how to read the map. Unfortunately, there's no X marking this particular spot. They can make a Moderate (7) Espionage (Cryptography) or Intellect Test, with +1 to the Difficulty for every piece of the map they didn't find. Success indicates they decipher the code correctly; failure means they must keep working on it for 1d6 more hours and try again. Dramatic Failure means they've deciphered it incorrectly and go gallivanting off to a completely wrong destination.

After the characters decipher the map, they must follow Tredegar Jones's somewhat cryptic directions to the right location. This requires some Tests using the Captain's Shipboard Systems (Flight Control) or Space Sciences (Stellar Cartography) skills, either of which the holodeck computer translates as a pirate captain's navigational abilities. The base Difficulty Number for the Test is Difficult (13); this assumes the Captain just skims the map and other documents for one hour. For every additional hour spent studying the documents, up to a maximum of five, reduce the Difficulty Number by 1. Don't tell the Captain's player this, of course; just ask him to tell you how long he wants to spend reviewing the documents. If he wanted to, he could take days and days going over them—but time is of the essence, since the Viceroy likely read them himself and could get word to Ironface about the treasure's location. (Of course, the player could study the map off the holodeck.)

If the "Navigation" Test succeeds, Captain Beauregard determines the *Falcon* passed not too far south of some tiny islands in the Florida Keys. The educated guess says the most likely location for the treasure is Magnolia Key, an island so tiny it does not appear on many charts. If the Test fails, Captain Beauregard can try again after studying the documents for at least one more hour, but with +1 to the initial Difficulty established by the Captain's study (per the rules for Additional Attempts on page 122 of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game* core rulebook).

If Captain Beauregard suffers a Dramatic Failure, he makes the wrong deduction about the treasure's location and heads for some small islands south of Hispaniola—which almost certainly gives Ironface time to find the treasure himself and achieve victory. If you prefer to avoid this unpleasant conclusion, you



can always have Captain Beauregard realize his mistake halfway to the bogus location, recalculate things correctly, and race to Magnolia Key in time for a final battle with Ironface.

CHAPTER NINE: THE FALCON'S GOLD

Assuming all goes well, the *Atocha* sails to Magnolia Key, anchors nearby, and sends a party ashore to search for the treasure. For maximum effect, let all the Crew characters go ashore and find the treasure, then, while the NPC crew loads the treasure chests on board, they return back to the ship in time for a final battle with the *Reaver*.

Magnolia Key is a tiny island covered with dense brush—everything from thick mangroves along much of the shore to brambles and thickets building up to a subtropical forest inland. Mosquitoes and other unpleasant insects abound, characters may step on poison ivy, and the island hosts a few deer who, if it's rutting season, may not be as scared of well-armed men as they should. The crew spots one or two good landing beaches for their launch.

Once the party gets ashore, describe the conditions to them in detail. Everyone can make Routine (5) Planetary Survival (Forest) Tests to adapt to and search

the place more easily. For every two points by which a character makes the Test, give him a +1 Test Result bonus to the Challenging (9) Search Test needed to find the treasure.

The character who makes the highest Search Test result over Challenging (9) finds a pair of live oak trees slowly dying in the grip of strangler fig trees. They present an odd, almost macabre picture, like two zombie sentinels standing guard at a gate long after the castle behind them has fallen. The space between the two trees would be perfect for hiding buried treasure—which is why Tredegar Jones put the *Falcon's* gold there.

Troubleshooting: If you want to inject an element of the macabre into this holonovel, Captain Beauregard discovers an interesting account among the documents from the *Guadalupe*. It relates Tredegar Jones's practice of killing one of his men every time he buried some treasure, leaving that man's ghost to guard the gold. When the *Atocha's* crew finds the treasure—at night, of course—the ghost rises up from his golden grave to attack them!

CHAPTER TEN: THE RETURN OF IRONFACE

At the most dramatic moment the *Atocha's* crew spots a ship approaching—Ironface's *Reaver*! It might arrive while Captain Beauregard and the other characters are on the island and must race back to their ship. Ironface could appear right after the treasure has been loaded aboard, thus slowing the *Atocha*. Apparently the Viceroy got word to Ironface and gave him enough information to find the *Falcon's* gold.

This encounter is the holonovel's final battle. The two great pirate ships pound away at each other, eventually coming close enough to grapple. One last, bloody fight decides which crew reigns supreme as the greatest pirates of the Spanish Main. One climactic duel determines whether Captain Beauregard sends Ironface's soul shrieking down to Hell, or whether the evil captain feeds his old enemy's body to the sharks. Play it up for maximum drama, excitement and swashbuckling suspense.

SEQUELS

If your players enjoyed the pirate's life, they may want to return to this holonovel's setting.

Hunt the Atocha: Sepúlveda decides he must destroy Captain Beauregard before he reveals the Spanish Viceroy's role in the *Falcon's* treasure incident. He sends several ships of the Spanish Navy after the *Atocha*. Captain Beauregard must play a cat-and-mouse game among the islands with several larger, more powerful ships to preserve his life, the life of his crew and the valuable cargo of medicines he must deliver to colonists on Hispaniola suffering from fever.

The Temple of Kukulcan: Captain Beauregard hears rumors of a strange, ancient temple on a tiny, uncharted island west of the Greater Antilles. The temple supposedly contains a vast quantity of Aztec gold. He must race two other pirate ships and their crews who also want this treasure, to get to the island and explore the danger-filled temple. Think "*Raiders of the Lost Ark* meets *Captain Blood*."

Marooned: The *Atocha* runs aground near a small island, causing severe damage to the hull which takes weeks to repair. As the crew explores the island, they discover another band of pirates—a much more bloodthirsty one—maintains a secret haven on the other side of the island! The two groups must fight for control of the island and of the other pirates' ship.

GENRE TEMPLATE

Genre: _____

Examples: _____

Imagery: _____

Themes: _____

Stock Characters:

1. _____:

Quote: _____

2. _____:

Quote: _____

3. _____:

Quote: _____

4. _____:

Quote: _____

5. _____:

Quote: _____

Plot Devices: _____

HOLODECK PERSONA

Name: _____

Role: _____

Type: _____

Backstory: _____

Attributes: _____

Standard Skills: _____

Special Skills: _____

Advantages/Disadvantages: _____

Demeanor: _____

Goals: _____

Costume: _____

HOLODECK PERSONA

Name: _____

Role: _____

Type: _____

Backstory: _____

Attributes: _____

Standard Skills: _____

Special Skills: _____

Advantages/Disadvantages: _____

Demeanor: _____

Goals: _____

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THE SKULL AND THE SWORD

A HOLONOVEL OF THE WORLD OF BORALIA

BACKGROUND

When an ancient being of incredible evil power, the Skull King, arises once more to threaten the world, only one man, Prince Eldred of Armorica, stands between it and the enslavement of the peoples of Boralia. Together with a band of comrades, Prince Eldred must search for the Sword of Vanderlac, the blade his ancestors wielded when they defeated the Skull King more than a thousand years ago. Racing against time and the Skull King's minions, Prince Eldred must succeed to save the world and all he holds dear from the touch of the greatest evil Boralia has ever known.

THE MAIN CHARACTERS

CREWMEMBER PERSONAE

You can run *The Skull and the Sword* for just one player or an entire group, depending upon your circumstances. The main hero of the story, Prince Eldred, can serve as the character for a single player if you wish to run the adventure as a "solo" episode. In that case, you as Narrator can play the NPCs described below—such as Master Maldorius the wizard—or simply ignore them. None of them play a crucial role in the story. If you want to use this episode for two or more players, allow the additional characters to take on a greater role. Let the players review the roles available in the holonovel and choose which ones they want (high die roll gets to pick first, and characters' gender may be altered if necessary). Discard unused characters or run them as NPCs. Only Prince Eldred can slay the Skull King—if no player wishes to run him, you must introduce him as an NPC.

PRINCE ELDRED OF ARMORICA

Prince Eldred of Armorica is the handsome young scion of a proud family which has ruled Armorica for centuries. He received training in all the arts and skills appropriate for an heir to the throne—everything from swordplay to diplomacy to the politics of court. As the last heir of the great hero Vanderlac, only he can wield Vanderlac's powerful Sword—the sole weapon which can slay the Skull King.

PRINCE ELDRED OF ARMORICA

Role: Protagonist

Type: Prince, noble warrior and heir to both the throne and the legacy of Vanderlac.

Backstory: A prince raised in the valorous warrior tradition of the Kings of Armorica, destined to rule that realm one day.

Demeanor: Self-confident, assertive, used to receiving

GENRE TEMPLATE: EPIC FANTASY

Examples: *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Three Stars Trilogy* by Patricia McKillip, *The Belgariad* by David Eddings.

Imagery: Sweeping, majestic natural vistas. Noble cities besieged by the armies of the Evil Lord. Magnificent kings leading men into battle to save the world. A group of heroes journeying across the land on a great quest.

Themes: Preserving that which is good and true from evil, corruption or dissipation. Persevering against great odds to save innocents who don't appreciate the threats facing them and their world, and who often scorn the heroes.

Stock Characters:

The Subject of Prophecy: This character, usually a warrior or heir to the throne, must complete a great destiny. Unless he manages to fulfill it (with the help of the other characters), the world will plunge into darkness.

Quote: "But I don't understand—how could that be me?"

The Wise Wizard: Wearing a hooded cloak (or cloak and hat), carrying a staff and sporting a long gray beard, he contributes his wisdom and knowledge to the group of heroes. He sometimes keeps his wisdom in reserve, since it's more dramatic to keep the other characters from learning the greater, often more disturbing truth. He also wields considerable magical power, but rarely uses it full-force—the sheer fact everyone knows he's powerful usually makes them back down.

Quote: "Do not tamper with forces you do not understand."

The Noble Warriors: Obstacles and enemies aplenty exist to bedevil a group of questing heroes, so many of them must possess skill with sword and arrow. This stock character ranges from the knight in shining armor and the cloaked woodsman to the heroic-hearted mercenary captain.

Quote: "Ware arrows! Fall back while we deal with these foul folk!"

The Nonhumans: These characters are members of nonhuman races, such as elves, dwarves, gnomes or winged folk. They contribute their race's knowledge, their unique fighting skills or crafts and similar talents to the party.

Quote: "In the lands of the Dwarves, he is known as *Tathroz Vaar*, the Foul Shadow."

The Innocent: Often a younger person or someone from a faraway land, this character knows little or nothing about what's really going on in the world. He's somehow drawn into the story—perhaps as the ward of another character, through some accident, or because he's also the Subject of Prophecy. He often asks questions so the more experienced characters can explain things to him (and to the audience).

Quote: "Why does the Evil Lord want to kill Astorius, anyway?"

The Evil Lord: Leader of the forces of darkness which the heroes oppose. This character, often a fallen god or ultra-powerful wizard, embodies all that is evil, corrupt, foul, wicked and despicable. He commands vast magical powers and armies of evil minions.

Quote: "Purblind fool! Did you truly think you stood a chance against the power of the Black Throne?"

The Corrupted: This character—a king, a courtier or another wizard—fell under the sway of the Evil Lord (directly or indirectly), and works his will as a traitor among the Good Folk.

Quote: "Surely, m'lord, you would not risk the lives of the sons of Ilgaria in a futile attempt to oppose the Evil Lord?"

Plot Devices: A magical item holds the key to the Evil Lord's defeat, if only the characters can find or properly exploit it. The Corrupted attempts to foil the works of the Good Folk, only to be exposed and defeated by the heroes. The long-forgotten heir of a powerful king steps forward to assume his crown and lead the Good Folk to victory.

THE SKULL AND THE SWORD

respect (and giving it in turn), expects his social inferiors to obey him.

Goals: For this holonovel, Prince Eldred wishes to recover the Sword of Vanderlac and stop the Skull King from destroying the world. In general, he wants to bring honor to his family and his realm, and, in time, to rule Armorica justly.

Costume: At court Prince Eldred usually wears colorful doublets or tunics of silk and other fine clothes, with a small golden crown indicating his royal status. In the field he wears sturdier garb, including chain mail and surcoat (+3 Armor against all attacks), and carries a broadsword and dagger (see page 238 of the **Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game** core rulebook for statistics on these weapons). He may carry a shield if the player wishes, providing +4 to Block attempts.

PRINCE ELDRED

Fitness: 3

Strength +1

Vitality +2

Coordination: 3

Reaction +1

Intellect: 3

Perception +1

Presence: 4

Willpower +1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Animal Handling (Horse) 3 (4), Charm (Influence) 2 (3), Command (Combat Leadership) 2 (3), Planetary Tactics (Small Unit) 2 (3), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) 3 (4)

Traits: Bold +1, Shrewd +1

Resistance: 5

Wound Levels: 5/5/5/5/5/0

MASTER MALDORIUS

Several of Prince Eldred's old friends and comrades might participate in his quest. The first, Master Maldorius, is one of the few surviving wizards in Boralia. Although his powers do not equal those of the great sorcerers of old, his vast lore and spells serve to protect Prince Eldred from the Skull King's minions.

MASTER MALDORIUS

Role: Supporting Character

Type: Wise Wizard

Backstory: One of the last wizards in Boralia, Master Maldorius has studied the Arts Arcane for centuries.

Demeanor: Knowledgeable yet close-mouthed and enigmatic; inscrutable.

Goals: Maldorius's goals, both for this holonovel and in general, are to destroy the Skull King and usher Boralia into a new era of peace and prosperity without his shadow looming over it. Since he knows he's too weak to defeat the Skull King on his own, he protects the one man—Prince Eldred—who can slay him.

Costume: Master Maldorius typically wears blue robes and a hat, keeps a black beard and carries a Wizard's Staff.

MASTER MALDORIUS

Fitness: 2

Coordination: 3

Reaction +1

Intellect: 5

Logic +1

Perception +2

Presence: 5

Willpower +1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Animal Handling (Horse) 2 (3), Medical Sciences (First Aid) 2 (3), Primitive Weaponry (Staff) 1 (2)

Special Skills: Knowledge (Boralia Legends & Lore) 4, Magic 4

Traits: Curious +1, Excellent Sight +2, Code Of Honor (Wizard's Oath) -2

Resistance: 2

Wound Levels: 2/2/2/2/2/0

Special Ability: Master Maldorius wields wizardly powers. The holodeck computer assumes he has a special Intellect-based Skill, *Magic*, at level 4. A character taking this role simply gestures and speaks a predetermined casting phrase (such as "Abracadabra Animal Speak") and, if his Magic Test succeeds, the holodeck creates the effect and determines what, if anything, he accomplishes. Maldorius also uses his staff as a weapon (Accuracy 7, Block +3, Damage 2+2d6).

Master Maldorius can use any of the following powers or "spells" with his Magic Skill. Typically this requires a Routine (4) Magic Test, unless noted otherwise.

- **Animal Speak:** He can "summon" and converse with small animals.
- **Bloodweaving:** This difficult spell allows Master Maldorius to heal minor injuries and wounds. If he succeeds with a Moderate (7) Magic Test, he heals up to 3 total points' worth of damage (for one or more characters). He may only do this once per hour.
- **Fire Mastery:** He can control fires of up to 5 meters radius diameter, causing them to blaze hotter, go out or move in a particular direction. To a certain extent he can shape the fire to create simple images. He can also cause the tip of his wizard's staff or one of his hands to burst into flame (this does not harm him or the staff)—anyone touched by this "mageflame" suffers 3+1d6 damage.
- **Flash Lightning:** Master Maldorius can summon lightning from a storm, or project a bolt from his staff, if he succeeds with a Moderate (7) Magic Test. The attack has Range 5/20/50/100 and inflicts 12+3d6 damage.
- **Light Pool:** Creates a pool of light 3 meters in diameter, centered on his wizard's staff.
- **Magesight:** He can detect the presence of magic, enchantment or fantastic beasts.
- **Spellbreaking:** Maldorius can attempt to dispel ("break") the spells or powers of another wizard or the Skull King. This requires an Opposed Magic Test against the opponent. Few such contests should succeed in breaking the Skull King's dweomers; his arcane powers are simply too strong.
- **Weatherworking:** Master Maldorius can alter the weather within a 2 kilometer radius, though he cannot create extreme conditions (tornadoes, hurricanes, blizzards). This requires a Moderate (7) Magic Test.

CADMON DRUCE

A huntsman, tracker and archer, Cadmon Druce has served the Kings of Armorica all his life. His skill with bow and woodcraft matches his luck with the ladies and dice, both of which are considerable. As one of the Prince Eldred's tutors when the Prince was young, and the most skilled woodsman in Armorica, Druce feels honorbound

to assist Eldred with his quest.

CADMON DRUCE

Role: Supporting Character

Type: Noble Warrior

Backstory: A huntsman who's served the Armorican throne for years, Druce's family was slain by trolls, giving him a special hatred for that fell folk.

Demeanor: Druce is quiet, speaking only when spoken to or other necessity demands it. His hawk-like eyes constantly watch everything around him. He seems ever alert to dangers of which others are, at best, dimly aware.

Goals: To protect Prince Eldred and help him with his quest in any way.

Costume: Studded leather armor (+2 Armor against all attacks), huntsman's cloak and tunic, dagger, battle axe (Accuracy 8, Block +1, Damage 5+2d6), and a longbow with 20 arrows (Range 5/15/45/120, Damage 2+2d6).

CADMON DRUCE

Fitness: 4

Coordination: 4

Dexterity +1

Intellect: 2

Perception +2

Presence: 3

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Animal Handling (Horse) (Falcon) 3 (4) (4), Athletics (Hunting) 3 (4), Command (Combat Leadership) 1 (2), Planetary Tactics (Small Unit) 1 (2), Planetside Survival (Forest) 4 (5), Primitive Weaponry (Axe) (Longbow) 3 (4) (4), Stealth (Stealthy Movement) 3 (4)

Traits: Rapid Healing +1, Obsessive Tendencies (kill trolls) -3, Vengeful -2

Resistance: 4

Wound Levels: 4/4/4/4/4/0

SIR BEREK WULFHIRE

In contrast to Cadmon Druce, Sir Berek Wulfhere never felt at home in the woods. A knight of great prowess and renown, he prefers the tilting-field, battlefield or palace to taking long journeys through the dark lands of Boralia. Still, he swore to guard Prince Eldred's life with his own, so where the Prince goes, he goes. He wears plate armor and a steel helmet, carries a shield emblazoned with the arms of House Wulfhere, and wields the sword Talvring, a blade of honorable lineage and great accomplishment.

SIR BEREK WULFHIRE

Role: Supporting Character

Type: Noble Warrior

Backstory: A peer of Armorica, Sir Berek pledged his life to protect that of the King and the Prince.

Demeanor: Self-assured to the point of arrogance, haughty.

Goals: For this holonovel, Sir Berek must protect Prince Eldred and help him with his quest in any way. In the long term, he would like to obtain more and better titles and settle down to the life of the landed nobility.

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Costume: At court he wears only the best, but in the field he dons shining plate armor (+5 Armor against all attacks) with a navy blue surcoat depicting his coat of arms (three eagles on gold). He wields a broadsword and also uses a lance while on horseback only (Accuracy 9, Block +0, Damage 6+3d6). He also carries a shield providing +4 to Block attempts.

SIR BEREK WULFHIRE

Fitness: 3

Strength +2

Vitality +1

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 3

Presence: 3

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Animal Handling (Horse) 3 (4), Command (Combat Leadership) 2 (3), Planetary Tactics (Small Unit) 2 (3), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) (Lance) 3 (4) (4)

Traits: Promotion +3, Weapon Master (Sword) +4, Arrogant -1, Code Of Honor (Chivalry) -2

Resistance: 4

Wound Levels: 4/4/4/4/4/0

ALVETHIA

The strangest member of this small band of heroes is *Alvethia*, one of the *Turosa'skaa'Choreth*, or "Cloud Falcon People." While in most respects she resembles her four fellow protagonists, the two large wings sprouting from her shoulder blades make it obvious to all she comes from the Turosa cloud-castles. With her swift-darting rapier and razor-sharp *I'shala* throwing blades, not to mention her ability to fly out of harm's way, she makes a fierce and deadly opponent in battle. She joins Prince Eldred's band as a goodwill gesture from the Turosa, who wish to form a better relationship with the people of Boralia—and, of course, safeguard themselves from the Skull King.

ALVETHIA

Role: Supporting Character

Type: Nonhuman

Backstory: A diplomat of the Cloud Falcon People, she trained in their arts of war. Alvethia volunteered for a mission to approach the Ground Folk about developing closer alliances and trade routes. While "down below," as her people say, she became fond of the "Groundlings" and joined their quest as a preemptive means of protecting her own people.

Demeanor: Calm, rational, always in exquisite control of herself.

Goals: Right now Alvethia wants to see the Skull King destroyed. Fostering greater ties between her people and the Ground Folk remains her long-term goal.

Costume: Alvethia wears no armor. She dresses in sturdy, comfortable clothing. She carries a rapier-like sword, a

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dagger with a sky-blue stone set in the pommel, and several *I'shala* throwing blades, a type of throwing blade her people use (Range 5/10/25/50, Damage 1+1d6). She flies at a rate of 20 meters per round (the holodeck simulates this with tractor beams), with aerial agility based on her Coordination and Flying Maneuvers Skill. She carries her few belongings in small belt pouches.

ALVETHIA

Fitness: 2

Vitality +1

Coordination: 5

Dexterity +1

Reaction +1

Intellect: 2

Perception +2

Presence: 3

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Charm (Influence) 3 (4), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) (L'shala) 2 (3) (4)

Special Skills: Flying Maneuvers 3

Traits: Excellent Sight +2, Night Vision +2, Peripheral Vision +1, Sexy +2, Impulsive -1, Phobia (Claustrophobia) -3

Resistance: 3

Wound Levels: 3/3/3/3/3/0

If more than five players participate in this adventure, the Narrator can create additional characters for them to play. Some possibilities include a dwarf, elf or other member of the Fae Folk (see below) serving as ambassador to this expedition; a priest who received a vision from the gods to join the Prince; or a young and guileful thief from the Free City of Kalumard who stumbles into this whole mess in Chapter Three. For the most part their goals agree with those of the characters describe above: help Prince Eldred find the Sword of Vanderlac and save the world from the Skull King, though some may also pursue agendas of their own.

SUPPORTING CAST CHARACTERS

THE SKULL KING

The greatest force of evil in Boralia is the Skull King, a powerful being whom some think was a fallen god. The Skull King threatened the world with destruction and slavery once before, more than a thousand years ago. The hero Vanderlac defeated his plans. The Boralians believed Vanderlac slew the Skull King—unfortunately he only grievously wounded the fiend, and a being of the King's power does not die easily. It took more than a millennium for him to heal and reassemble his might. With the power of the newly-recovered Stone of Corruption to aid him, and a troll army of thousands at his beck and call, the Skull King seeks to conquer the world and slay all who oppose him.

KING VLADOS MURAT

King Vlos Murat of Karellia, a northern realm east of Armorica, joined the Skull King and works to bring his schemes to fruition. A greedy and ambitious man, King Vlos hopes to rule Boralia as the Skull King's regent after conquering the land.

SYNOPSIS

This holonovel chronicles the adventures of Prince Eldred and his companions as they try to find the Sword of Vanderlac so the Prince can confront and destroy the Skull King, saving the world. The novel opens with Drogan, King of Armorica, explaining the Skull King's rising to his son and heir, Eldred. The Sword of Vanderlac was lost ages ago when the hero supposedly dispatched the Skull King. Prince Eldred must sail across the Gulf of Armorica to the island of Eirin to consult the monks at Montfairn Abbey about the sword's possible resting place. Along the way, an unnaturally fierce storm tests his skills and those of any comrades accompanying him.

At Montfairn, Prince Eldred learns the only person who might know of the sword's location is the famed scholar Timros, who lives in the Free City of Kalumard. The band of heroes sails south, arriving at the wild port city a few days later. They find Timros near death. Shortly before they arrived, someone broke into his tower, injured and robbed him. With his dying breath, Timros gives Prince Eldred the information he needs to continue his quest.

Based on this clue, Prince Eldred and his companions journey north and east toward the Thuringian Reach. There, amid the towering mountain peaks, they seek the Vale of Shadows, where Vanderlac went to die after his final confrontation with the Skull King. They must race against a group of competitors hired by King Vlos who forced the information from Timros before they killed him. After an ambush and desperate battle, the heroes proceed to the Vale where they find the Sword of Vanderlac. Sword in hand, the heroes head north once again, this time for the Tower of Skulls itself! Along the way, minions and spies of the Skull King harass them, hoping to kill them or capture the sword. Since time is short, Prince Eldred may elect to journey through the Forbidden Pass, a terrifying road through the otherwise impassable Trollheim Peaks.

After barely making it through the Trollheims, the heroes find themselves in the Skull King's domain, the vast and terrible Northern Waste. Here they must dodge groups of trolls and other threats as they make their way toward the Skull King's Tower. Once there, Prince Eldred must walk through its shadowed hallways and terror-filled chambers to the Gargoyle Throne of the Skull King itself! There, in a hall made chill by the Skull King's almost palpable evil, Prince Eldred must fight the final battle to save his world.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

As a fantasy adventure, this episode features activities like swordfighting and riding horses—the character may not know Primitive Weaponry or Animal Handling (Horse), but they can use these Skills untrained (**Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game** core rulebook, page 121). As they progress through this holonovel, characters may develop an interest in the weapons of the period and begin studying the appropriate Skills so they can play the novel better.

If Master Maldorius needs other powers, you may give them to him using the spells in his description as guidelines. Award creative players who “invent” spells of their own on the fly, working within the spirit of the high-fantasy setting.

THE WORLD OF BORALIA

Slightly more than a thousand years ago a malign being known only as the Skull King made his presence known. He seemed to come from the Northern Waste, a region so desolate only the fierce, brutish trolls could live there. Although no one knew his origin, every wizard in Boralia could tell what awesome power he wielded. Gathering the trolls to him, the Skull King built his fearsome Tower of Skulls and led his forces through the Forbidden Pass into Boralia on a mission of conquest. He carried with him the Stone of Corruption, an item possessed of foul magics which magnified his power many times.

First Karellia then Thuringia fell to the Skull King's hordes.

When dozens of wizards, a breed of men never common in Boralia, challenged him, the Skull King destroyed them with his arcane might. Some say their souls were sucked into the Stone of Corruption to further empower the King. After annihilating a force composed of Thuringian, Thracian and Illyrian soldiers at the Battle of Greystone Dales, the Skull King marched south and laid waste to the proud Kingdom of Thracia.

The Skull King bypassed Armorica, thinking it a small kingdom of little consequence. This proved his undoing. As he ravaged the southlands, King Vanderlac of Armorica assembled an army and marched south, first communicating his intentions to the noble and valorous Duke Talerain of the Rosalian Palatinate. Vanderlac carried an enchanted sword forged for him out of star-iron and thunderbolts by the wizard Zoltravian.

Armorican and Rosalian forces caught the Skull King's vast troll army between them on the northern border of the Thracian Greatwood. In a terrible battle lasting two days and two nights, they gradually broke the back of his trollish defenses and scattered his army before them. Some trolls fled into the Greatwood, where their descendants live today.

With a retinue of his closest advisors and servants, the Skull King fled north to his tower. Vanderlac pursued and caught him near the gates of the Tower of Skulls. In a

climactic battle that lit the northern sky with fire and lightning, Vanderlac slew the Skull King with his sword, but himself received a death-wound. Taking the Stone of Corruption with him, he mounted his horse and rode south, leaving the Skull King's moldering body behind him. Somewhere in the Trollheim Mountains he cast the stone into a fathomless cleft, so no man might ever control its evil. Then, neither sleeping nor eating, dripping blood from his wound all the way, he rode south to rejoin his knights before he died.

Alas, the wound proved too great for even Vanderlac to withstand. As he passed the Thuringian Reach, he felt his death close upon him. Turning west, he rode into the mountains. Since then no man has seen the Sword of Vanderlac.

MAGIC

In the fantasy realm of Boralia, magic exists, though it isn't an everyday phenomenon. Persons known as wizards cast spells and work magic rituals, as can some other races and creatures. People recognize wizards by the staffs they carry and, in many cases, their inscrutable, know-it-all-but-won't-tell-you demeanor.

Two thousand years ago wizards were common in Boralia, and their spells reshaped the land and the politics of the world. After that their profession declined and their numbers diminished. During the Skull King's attack, many gave their lives in a futile effort to stop him. Today only a scant handful of wizards remain. Most isolate themselves in towers and hidden sanctums, refusing to have anything to do with the rest of the world.

The Adventure

CHAPTER ONE: REVELATIONS AND PORTENTS

The story begins when Prince Eldred and his companions enter the holodeck into the courts of King Drogan. They assemble in one of the King's meeting halls in his castle in Calabria, where he awaits them.

The vast hall contains the fine wood and leather furnishings one expects in the fortress of a Boralian ruler. A fire blazes in a large stone fireplace; above the mantelpiece several hunting trophies gaze dispassionately over the characters. Shields depicting Armorican nobles' coats of arms line the walls.

King Drogan's stern, no-nonsense demeanor masks a kindly heart and spirit of true nobility. He wears the casual robes and crown of the Kings of Armorica. He's well into middle age, with traces of gray showing in his black hair and beard—but he remains tall and strong, able to acquit himself bravely on the field of battle. King Drogan provides information to Prince Eldred and the other characters, stressing to them the seriousness of the situation. He must compel them to undertake the dangerous quest

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to defeat the Skull King.

You may read the following text to the players, paraphrase it, or let them learn it from the King through questions and roleplaying.

"Thank you for coming so swiftly, son. I'm sorry to draw you away from your other duties, but a matter of terrible import has arisen, and only you can serve the kingdom in its hour of greatest need.

"As you know, more than a thousand years ago our ancestor King Vanderlac defeated and destroyed the Skull King before the gates of the Tower of Skulls. For a millennium we Boralians have known the evil King was dead, and only the trolls remained to threaten our peace and safety. Unfortunately, it now seems we were wrong, and our hopes were in vain. Dark clouds gather in the North, and the Skull King has arisen once more!

"For years the wizards and sages of the realm sensed a growing presence of evil in the North, but its nature remained elusive. We thought it some great troll-lord who gathered a measure of power to himself, perhaps as a way to raise an army to attack the South. Sadly, the threat has proven far worse. The Skull King lives!

"It seems our ancestor failed in his quest to kill the Evil Lord. In his pride and folly, he thought dealing the Skull King a death-blow was enough to slay him, as with an ordinary man. But the Skull King is no mortal, and thus the ways of men do not apply to him. Somehow, maybe with the aid of his trollish servants, he survived the wound.

"Perhaps it took him a thousand years to recover his strength and power, or he regained his power long ago, and simply bided his time. I know not. But I suspect he spent the centuries of his recovery seeking something he lost, or rather, which Vanderlac took from him: the Stone of Corruption. Now, I believe, he has found it, and uses it to augment his already vast power.

"Our scouts brought us word that he gathers the trolls to him once more. Two conclusions are inescapable. First, he intends to attack the Boralian kingdoms soon. Gathering and commanding the trolls would prove difficult even for one of his power, so he dares not do it unless ready to move on the southlands at once. Second, he will seek vengeance on Armorica before he does aught else. We spelled his doom a thousand years ago, and he will not again make the mistake of passing us by. His troll legions will burn our towns and villages and lay waste our castles unless we stop him before he marches south.

"That is why I called you to me, son. Only the Sword of Vanderlac can defeat the Skull King, and we know not where it lies. You must find it and use it to destroy the

Evil Lord once and for all. I am too old to undertake such a quest, and must remain here to command the army. It is a heavy burden, I know, and I would take it from you if I could. But this road you must walk on your own. I pray it brings you to a good end, for if it does not, the world itself is doomed.

"I cannot tell you where to find the sword, for even I, a son of Vanderlac, know not where he chose to make his final resting place. But I am no scholar, though some among the loremasters might tell you more of Vanderlac's final days than I. Go to the monks of Montfairn Abbey on Eirin. If anyone can start you on your road, they can, for their chronicles of Boralia's history are unmatched.

"Good luck, my son, and walk your road carefully. The Skull King has ever been a master of treachery and deceit. If he came into his power long ago, as I suspect, he may have spies and agents everywhere, perhaps even here in court! Be miserly with your trust, and watchful with your eyes and heart, lest through arts more subtle than sorcery the Evil Lord defeats us."

CHAPTER TWO: A FAREWELL TO INNOCENCE

Prince Eldred (and his friends, if more than one player participates in this adventure) must prepare for the journey to Montfairn Abbey. Allow them to obtain whatever clothing and supplies they need, within reason. Make sure you find out whether the Prince intends to journey publicly (wearing his princely clothes and regalia) or incognito, since his appearance affects how NPCs initially react to him.

King Drogan supplies the characters with pouches of gold coins for expenses during the trip. He also arranges for one of his warships, the *Brezantia*, to take Prince Eldred to Eirin.

CHAPTER THREE: STORM RISING

A twenty-year veteran of the Armorican fleet, Captain Tavros Ahlin, commands the *Brezantia*. Dressed in rough sailor's garb, with only a heavy gold bracelet to mark his authority aboard the ship, he does not look like a skilled naval commander. He must transport the Prince safely to Eirin—no more, no less. Although deferential to the Prince's royal station, he brooks no challenges to his authority or questioning of his orders, particularly by characters who lack his experience at sea.

About halfway to Eirin, shortly after the ship sails from the Gulf of Armorica, an unusually strong storm from the north engulfs the ship! Within a few minutes the sky darkens, waves become taller and stronger, and bolts of lightning split the clouds. Soon the sky is almost black as

CHAPTER FOUR: MONTFAIRN ABBEY

night, and large drops of rain fall. Captain Ahlin and his sailors scurry about the deck like madmen, desperately trying to secure or protect everything on the vessel before the storm hits.

The storm breaks without any warning. Waves the size of houses crash, nearly capsizing the *Brezantia*. Rain and hail pound the ship from above and lightning threatens to set the rigging on fire or destroy the mast. All characters should make a Moderate (6) Coordination Test (or Athletics or Acrobatics, if they know those Skills). Failure means the character takes 1+1d6 damage from being thrown about a cabin or hit by flying objects. Characters on deck who fail their roll may wash overboard, requiring heroic efforts to rescue them. Feel free to create other perils with which the characters must cope.

If Master Maldorius accompanies the Prince, he can use his *weatherworking* spells to try calming the storm. Unfortunately, even his best efforts only lessen the storm's severity a little; he cannot dispel it entirely.

After a seemingly eternal period of suffering in the grip of the storm, the ship manages to make it through to calmer waters as the storm passes south. Fortunately, only one or two men were lost, and the ship itself suffered relatively little damage.

Besides providing a few moments of action and excitement, the storm gives the characters some new information to work with. It impresses upon them the Skull King's strength. A storm so sudden and strong could only be his work, and no wizard in Boralia could create a tempest of such fury so far away. Only luck or a miracle prevents the loss of the ship. If Master Maldorius participates, tell him this and let him relay the information to the other characters through roleplaying. Otherwise Captain Ahlin offers a few choice opinions about such a strong, sudden storm, and you can let the players draw their own conclusions.

The stormy attack reveals that the Skull King has agents within Castle Armorica itself! It seems highly unlikely he could so quickly know where the Prince was going and what quest he was undertaking. Master Maldorius knows—and any other character can remember with a Routine (5) Intellect roll—that the Skull King never possessed powers of clairvoyance (“farsight”) before. It's unlikely he found the Prince by scrying with a crystal ball or some similar method. The character who figures out the storm signals the presence of a spy earns +1 Experience.

Troubleshooting: The players may not want to sail to Eirin on the *Brezantia*, since doing so makes their journey obvious to spies and anyone else who watches for such things—hiding the unscheduled departure of an Armorican warship is impossible. They may instead make their own travel arrangements. It makes no difference which ship they take, as long as Captain Ahlin commands whatever vessel they choose.

After a day or so the *Brezantia* lands at the Eirianian port city of Dunderrial. There the Prince and his companions must buy horses and ride to the abbey (a Routine (4) Bargain Skill Test). The trip takes about two days by horse, four on foot. Unless you wish to arrange a colorful encounter for the characters along the way (meeting a hermit, suffering an assault by bandits, another attack by the Skull King), the holonovel simply advances to the scene at the abbey.

Montfairn Abbey, an ancient religious institution, rests in an idyllic valley deep within the Slevgarion Hills. As the characters approach, they see monks farming the fields around the abbey and herding cattle along the nearby hills. The Abbey itself, a sturdy, two-story building of gray stone, has a domed temple toward the rear and two broad wooden gates in front. While not a fortress, it clearly can defend itself if necessary.

After the characters knock on the gates and identify themselves, the monks admit them. A young monk escorts them first to a refectory (if they wish to eat), then to small, spartan rooms where they stay during their visit, and finally to an audience with Abbot Dowan himself.

An elderly balding man with a gray beard, Dowan, Abbot of Montfairn, wears the robes of the White Temple's high priest. Although his voice quavers slightly and his hands shake with palsy for a short while during the audience, he projects an aura of calmness, self-assurance, wisdom and benign concern for his “flock.” He sometimes seems nervous in the presence of Alvethia or any other nonhuman holonovel character. Dowan still manages to set aside his personal issues to help the characters find the Sword of Vanderlac.

Upon learning of the characters' mission, he pales and quickly agrees to aid them in any way possible. “I know not what information the Abbey's library holds about the Sword of Vanderlac, but I assure you the brothers will search every book if necessary to find the information you seek.” He offers to let Prince Eldred and any characters who can read assist the monks with their research.

During two days poring over dusty tomes and scrolls, any characters searching the library may make a Moderate (7) Search Test. Those who succeed discover a volume entitled *The Chronicles of the Black King* (if no character passes the Test, a monk finds the book). The *Chronicles* detail the Skull King's history, his rise to power, his war on the kingdoms of Boralia, his demise, and the aftermath. Unfortunately the back half of the book was burned beyond legibility during a Vulkring attack on the abbey several years ago. But the author's name—Timros—was not defaced.

Abbot Dowan informs the characters that Timros, a famed scholar, used to live in the Free City of Kalumard. He knows not whether Timros still lives there, or lives at all, for that matter—but it gives the characters a clue to follow.

CHAPTER FIVE: KALUMARD

The characters return to their vessel and set sail for Kalumard. Unless you want waylay them with a storm, sea-serpent or some other marine threat, the holonovel advances to their arrival in the Free City's harbor.

Even from the ship the characters sense the rollicking spirit of excitement and action that pervades Kalumard. Vessels from a dozen nations and trading houses fill its port with colorful sails and banners. Towers of every shape and description form a chaotic skyline of unusual beauty and charm.

After the *Brezantia* docks and pays its harbor fee, the characters search for Timros the scholar. The harbormaster never heard of him, so they must keep asking until they find him. They work their way through the steep, winding streets of Kalumard, asking shopkeepers and merchants. For a humorous interlude, the characters encounter citizens who ask questions in response to their queries—"Who wants to know?" or "Timros! That greasy-bearded fiend owes me three silver crowns. What do *you* want with him?" These townsfolk might even give them conflicting directions. Let the characters roam the city for a while, getting lost and then finding their way again.

CHAPTER SIX: THE TOWER OF TIMROS

Eventually someone points the characters to Timros' tower, a three-story edifice bordering the Artists' District. The wooden door appears normal, but when the characters knock on it, it swings open—it wasn't locked, very unusual in Kalumard. If they enter, the characters soon discover why: someone's robbed Timros! The thieves overturned shelves and tables, smashed furniture, ripped up paintings and shattered alchemical glassware.

On the third floor, his library and astrological viewing platform, the characters find Timros lying in a pool of blood. His assailants beat and stabbed him, and it's obvious, even with Master Maldorius' magic, Timros has only a short time to live. The library is a shambles—few of Timros' dozens of books remain in one piece.

Timros barely lives, though. When he sees the characters enter his library, he recognizes the Prince. Timros feebly beckons them over to him. When they get close enough, he whispers, through coughs and in a pain-racked voice, "Wanted... *Chronicles*... Sword... found book, couldn't stop them... Vale of Shadows..."—and then he dies. In his death-throes he gestures desperately toward a partially-smashed cabinet on the floor.

Smart characters should investigate the cabinet which interested Timros so much in his last moments. They must smash it open since it remains locked and they cannot find the key. Years ago, Timros placed the notes from which he wrote the *Chronicles* inside this cabinet, and his killers stopped searching for them after they found a copy of the book itself.

The notes describe the legends Timros collected about the Vale of Shadows, a semi-mythic place where the goddess Shalaria was born. According to the legends, "twin peaks of fire and ice" guard the entrance to the Vale, and "silver-leaved oak trees" line its meadows and rocky hillsides. Other legends say the gods recognized Vanderlac's accomplishments by causing a spring to bubble up from the rock where he laid down to die.

Troubleshooting: If the characters disguise themselves, Timros may not recognize them at once. Roll three dice for his Intellect against a Moderate (6) difficulty to realize the Prince's true identity. If this roll fails, Timros dies without divulging any useful clues. Instead of Timros telling the characters about the Vale of Shadows, they find beneath his body a blood-soaked copy of *The Chronicles of the Black King* he somehow hid from his killers. The book mentions the Vale of Shadows as the supposed final resting place of Vanderlac.

CHAPTER SEVEN: STREET BRAWL

With these slim clues to follow, the characters must proceed to the Thuringian Reach and try to find the Vale, and, hopefully, the Sword of Vanderlac. But first a surprise awaits them. The thugs King Vlosos hired to obtain the *Chronicles* from Timros left an accomplice to watch the tower. When the characters entered, he alerted the killers to their presence. Before the PCs leave the city, another group of leg-breakers hired by the first group attacks the characters to delay them—giving the first group a head start finding the Vale.

If the characters look around before entering Timros' tower, they can make the usual Opposed Test to perceive the accomplice (their Search Skill or Intellect versus the accomplice's Stealth). If spotted, the accomplice runs, escaping into the maze of streets in the Artists' Quarter (which he knows quite well). Then he alerts the thugs.

Stage the attack wherever it seems most dramatically appropriate—right outside Timros' Tower, at the docks as the characters return to their ship, in a tavern where they decide to spend the evening, the livery stable when they buy horses for the journey north. Enough thugs should confront the characters to give them a good fight; at least one thug per character.

When defeated, the thugs (if any remain alive) quickly confess they were working for another group of ruffians led by a man named Gorlag. Gorlag recently left town and headed north in a hurry.

Troubleshooting: If the characters suffer defeat at the hands of the thugs—hopefully an unlikely occurrence—you can end the adventure and declare that the players lost; it's reasonable the thugs simply kill them. If everyone wants to continue the adventure, the thugs take them prisoner, hoping to ransom them. Roleplay their great escape and ultimate victory over the thugs.

If any characters die during the fight, the Crewmembers can simply restart the scene, hopefully doing better the

TYPICAL BORALIAN THUG**Role:** Antagonist**Type:** Warrior**Backstory:** These ruffians grew up on the streets of Boralia's cities, making their living by stealing, bullying and hiring themselves out as thugs for those who could pay. They live to acquire whatever pitiful wealth they can and satisfy their need for violence.**Demeanor:** Usually bold and obnoxiously aggressive until threatened by a superior combatant, when they back down like dogs.**Goals:** In this scene, the thugs must delay, and if necessary kill, anyone sniffing around Timros' tower.**Costume:** Usually shabby clothing and leather armor, various weapons (mostly swords and axes), sometimes a shield as well.

Fitness: 3

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 2

Presence: 2

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Animal Handling (Horse) 1 (2), Dodge 1, Intimidation (Torture) 1 (2), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) 1 (2), Stealth (Stealthy Movement) 1 (2), Streetwise (Kalumard) 2 (3), World Knowledge (Boralia) 1 (2)**Traits:** Bloodlust -2, Greedy -1**Resistance:** 3**Wound Levels:** 3/3/3/3/3/0

second time around.

CHAPTER EIGHT: QUEST FOR THE VALE

With fresh horses and supplies, the characters set out to find the fabled Vale of Shadows. By now they should suspect agents of the Skull King have also begun searching for the Vale.

Unless you need to roleplay it for dramatic purposes, the holonovel skips to the characters' arrival in the Thuringian Reach. These towering peaks seem harsh and intimidating, yet beautiful. Based upon other legends and myths they've heard, the characters start their search near the center of the range.

There's no need to spend a lot of time on the early, fruitless parts of their search, except perhaps to mention they occasionally find the remains of some other group's campfire or horse tracks (the tracks never last long enough to follow, unfortunately). Depending upon the players' mood, you may wish to describe the weather as a symbolic way of accentuating their feelings—for example, if they've begun to give in to despair, the weather turns rainy.

Eventually, though, one of the characters notices two unusual peaks one morning or late afternoon. (Prince Eldred should discover this, but you can have them make a Search Test for it.) Set close together, they seem very similar—almost twins. As the sun strikes them, one side of each appears as if on fire, the other remains icy and cold. These, of course, are the "twin peaks" mentioned in the legends.

Riding toward them, the characters soon enter a rough, rocky defile difficult to traverse. You may require them to make some Animal Handling or Athletics rolls to emphasize the danger. Once they make it through the defile they enter a lush, beautiful, isolated valley. Soon they notice the large oak trees with leaves whose underside shows a distinctive silvery sheen when the wind blows. If they make Intellect or Tracking rolls, they also notice horse tracks—Gorlag and his men have found the Vale, too!

CHAPTER NINE: VANDERLAC'S TOMB

After searching the Vale for a time, Prince Eldred and company find what resembles a sort of path between some beautiful flowered bushes. It doesn't appear used—but the plants, trees and rocks in the area seem to have formed a natural trail.

The path leads toward the Vale's edge and up into the hills. Eventually it winds its way out of the woods to a grassy plateau bordering a sheer rock cliff face. A huge stone slab stands flush against the cliffside. The symbol of the Royal House of Armorica, a thorn-bush encircling a crown, is engraved on the stone, unfaded by time or weather. A spring bubbles up from between some nearby rocks, sending a stream cascading over the plateau edge. The entire clearing evokes a feeling of reverence and awe in the characters, as if some holy presence inhabits this place.

Only Prince Eldred can move the stone slab. Any effort by the other characters is wasted; they can neither move nor damage the stone in any way. This is a Nearly Impossible (20) Test for those characters who insist on trying. But if Prince Eldred touches the crown in the stone's center, it slowly sinks back into the ground with a low, deep rumble. The noise also attracts Gorlag and his men waiting in the Vale to ambush the Prince once he obtains the sword.

Behind the slab the characters find a cave. A faint glow emanates from deep within. If they proceed, they soon find a large, dome-like cavern. A skeleton wearing chainmail and holding a sword lies on another, finer stone slab in the center. A mysterious light suffuses the air in the cave, making everything and everyone seem to glow faintly.

THE SWORD OF VANDERLAC

Vanderlac's skeleton holds a broadsword with a gold hilt and guard. Polished lapis lazuli decorates its pommel. The entire sword emits a very faint light—Prince Eldred soon discovers the light blazes brighter the closer the blade comes to the Skull King.

For the most part, the sword functions as a normal broadsword. When used against the Skull King, however, reduce its Accuracy by two and add three to the damage it inflicts. No one and nothing can break the Sword of Vanderlac except for the Skull King.

THE SKULL AND THE SWORD

GORLAG AND HIS MEN

While Prince Eldred and his friends investigate Vanderlac's tomb and recover the famed sword, the Skull King's minions wait in ambush. King Vados hired Gorlag to find the Sword of Vanderlac and retrieve it before Prince Eldred escapes with it. At some point before they leave the Vale, Gorlag and his men ambush the heroes. Since the tomb entrance won't open for someone like Gorlag, he waits until Prince Eldred gets the sword before attacking.

As before, the opposition should match the characters' strength. If Prince Eldred is alone, he encounters only Gorlag. For every additional character, you probably need at least one thug. Gorlag is a big, strong, ugly fellow who's reputed to have trollish blood in his veins. Even if that's not true, he's definitely a tough opponent.

If the characters capture or kill Gorlag, they find a coded letter in his belt-pouch. Any character with Espionage (Cryptography) can try decoding the message; it simply commissions Gorlag to obtain the Sword of Vanderlac and kill or delay Prince Eldred for a large sum of money. But all characters notice the message was marked with the royal seal of King Vados of Karellian!

GORLAG

Role: Antagonist

Type: Warrior

Backstory: Half troll and half human, Gorlag never fit into either society. He led an outcast's life among street ruffians and country brigands, using his strength to win influence and power. King Vados sometimes hire him to carry out his underhanded schemes.

Demeanor: A loud, proud, swaggering bully and killer, he's not afraid to fight any man. He relishes the sight of his enemies' blood.

Goals: Stop Prince Eldred's quest from succeeding, preferably by killing him, and recover the Sword of Vanderlac for King Vados. If possible, squeeze more money and other advantages out of this whole deal.

Costume: Gorlag himself is exceedingly ugly, with swarthy, pockmarked skin, several unpleasant-looking scars, a ratty black beard and mop of hair. He wears clothing now worn and dirty from lack of care beneath rusty chain mail. He carries a sword, longbow and several knives.

Fitness: 4

Strength +2

Vitality +1

Coordination: 3

Reaction +1

Intellect: 3

Presence: 3

Willpower +1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Animal Handling (Horse) 2 (3), Athletics (Running) 2 (3), Command (Thugs) 1 (2), Dodge 3, Intimidation (Torture) 3 (4), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) (Bow) 3 (4) (4), Search 2, Stealth (Stealthy Movement) 2 (3), Streetwise (Kalumard) 3 (4)

Traits: Mixed Species Heritage (Human, Troll) +6, Quick-draw +2, Bloodlust -2, Greedy -1, Rapid Healing +1

Resistance: 5

Wound Levels: 5/5/5/5/5/0

CHAPTER TEN: NORTHWARD

With Sword of Vanderlac in hand and King Vados' agents defeated, the characters must head northward toward the Tower of Skulls itself! As they travel north, you might inject several mini-scenes to impress upon the characters the gravity of their mission and the its timing. They dare not dally or let the enemy delay them, or else the Skull King's schemes may bear evil fruit. Some possible mini-scenes include:

- A stop for the night in an inn somewhere along the way. While resting they overhear two merchants talking worriedly about "the fighting up north."
- A momentary pause to look out over the fields where the Battle of Greystone Dales occurred. Although the battle raged more than a thousand years ago, people still consider the site a place of evil and dread because so many died there. It should serve as a grim reminder of the consequences of failure. If the group stays the night, a ghost could confront them.
- Passing a group of refugees heading south, who say they fled "the trolls" and don't plan to go back.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: A TRAITOR REVEALED

Unfortunately the Skull King anticipated Prince Eldred's quest and acted preemptively to stop it. Knowing the Prince would almost certainly risk the Forbidden Pass to reach the Tower of Skulls as quickly as possible, the Skull King began his attack on the southern kingdoms. An army of trolls and traitorous men (mainly from Karellia) now occupies the wilderness between the Black Forest and the Tirellion River. Meanwhile, scouts and outriders search for the Prince.

Prince Eldred, even with the help of his friends, cannot confront an entire troll army. He must find a way to sneak around it. Going the long way (perhaps through Armoriga and around the western end of the Trollheims) takes weeks longer than the straight route—too long.

Let the players choose their route. Possibilities include moving stealthily through the Black Forest, sailing up the Tirellion in small boats, and trying to slip through the trollish lines in disguise. Sooner or later, though, the characters encounter a group of mounted warriors. Leading that patrol is none other than the Karellian King, Vados.

Vados sneers at the Prince and pronounces his doom. He has a cold, insulting manner, a rapier-like wit, and a fiendishly clever mind—he doesn't hesitate using them to goad Prince Eldred into a potentially fatal confrontation. The players must decide whether to try escaping the mounted patrol or fight their way out. A skirmish would be tough, but not impossible to survive; escape requires some deception or outside interference (such as Master Maldorius conjuring a storm).

King Vados' appearance reveals his participation in the Skull King's plot and gives the players a choice. Since

KING VLADOS MURAT OF KARELLIA**Role:** Antagonist**Type:** Warrior, King**Backstory:** Hungry for power, King Vados conspires with the Skull King to conquer Boralia.**Demeanor:** Regal, haughty, expects obedience from all but other kings, constantly watching everything and everyone around him, confidence bordering on arrogance.**Goals:** Conquer Boralia.**Costume:** King Vados is a darkly handsome man with black hair and beard. His green eyes smolder with jealousy at anyone else's power or success. He wears the finest of royal robes when at home; in the field he wears plate armor and carries sword and shield.

Fitness: 4

Strength +1

Vitality +1

Coordination: 4

Dexterity +1

Intellect: 4

Logic -1

Perception +1

Presence: 4

Empathy -1

Willpower +1

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Administration (Karellian Court) 4 (5), Animal Handling (Horse) 4 (5), Command (Military Leadership) 3 (4), Dodge 3, Law (Karellian Law) 3 (4), Persuasion (Debate) 2 (3), Planetary Tactics (Karellian Army) 4 (5), Planetside Survival (Forest) (Mountains) 2 (3) (3), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) (Lance) 4 (5) (5), Search 2, Stealth (Stealthy Movement) 1 (2), Strategic Operations (Boralian Strategies) 3 (4)**Traits:** Alertness +2, Arrogant -1, Dark Secret (alliance with Skull King) -2, Vengeful -2, Weapon Master (Sword) +2**Resistance:** 5**Wound Levels:** 5/5/5/5/5/0**KARELLIAN SOLDIER****Role:** Antagonist**Type:** Warrior**Backstory:** These minions of King Vados follow his orders unquestioningly, despite his alliance with the Skull King's forces.**Demeanor:** Confident, obedient.**Goals:** Support King Vados; survive.**Costume:** Karellian soldiers wear chain mail and carry swords and shields.

Fitness: 2

Vitality +1

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 2

Presence: 3

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Animal Handling (Horse) 2 (3), Dodge 1, Planetary Tactics (Karellian Army) 2 (3), Planetside Survival (Forest) 1 (2), Primitive Weaponry (Sword) 2 (3), Search 2, Stealth (Stealthy Movement) 2 (3)**Resistance:** 3**Wound Levels:** 3/3/3/3/3/0**TROLL WARRIOR****Role:** Antagonist**Type:** Enemy race**Backstory:** Vicious, cruel humanoids who serve the Skull King.**Demeanor:** Crude, brutish, immensely strong and powerful.**Goals:** Obey the Skull King and destroy his enemies.**Costume:** Trolls have hard, leathery, gray-green skin. They wear crudely-manufactured leather and chain mail armor, and wield large weapons inflicting +3 damage.

Fitness: 5

Strength +2

Vitality +2

Coordination: 2

Intellect: 1

Logic -1

Perception -1

Presence: 3

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Planetary Tactics (Skull King Army) 1 (2), Planetside Survival (Mountains, Waste) 2 (3) and (3), Primitive Weaponry (Troll weapon of choice) 3 (4)**Special Skills:** None.**Traits:** Excellent Metabolism +1, High Pain Threshold +2, Leathery Skin (counts as +2 Armor against all attacks), Toughness +2**Resistance:** 7**Wound Level:** 8/8/8/8/8/0

escape is the best route, don't make it impossible. Vados and his men shouldn't surround the Prince's group or trap them in a lethal ambush. He's haughty and proud—quick to assume he's trapped the Prince without truly cutting him off. Perhaps one of the other characters, such as Sir Berec, sacrifices his life to allow the other characters to escape and continue toward the Forbidden Pass.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE FORBIDDEN PASS

The characters must traverse the Forbidden Pass to reach the Tower of Skulls in time to stop the invasion of the southern kingdoms. The pass presents the only hope for reaching the Skull King before his troll army ravages Armorica and Thuringia. Unfortunately, squads of the Skull King's troll warriors now use the Forbidden Pass regularly, making it even more dangerous than normal for Prince Eldred. Stealth and speed become essential.

Have the players make four Routine (5) Stealth Tests. If half or more of them fail a particular roll, a squad of trolls has found them, and they must run or fight. If any of them obtain a Dramatic Success, they manage to slip past a squad unnoticed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: STORMING THE TOWER

The heroes encounter few difficulties between the mountains and the Tower of Skulls. The Northern Waste is cold and forbidding. Unless our heroes are foolish enough to come this far without enough food and warm clothes for the journey, the conditions are merely uncomfortable. Trolls patrol this area in numbers, but cautious characters hide from them in the scraggly thickets and copses which dot the landscape. The farther north they go, the more overcast and darker the skies become. Ominous flashes of lightning illuminate the landscape below.

When the characters approach within a kilometer of the Tower of Skulls, the Sword of Vanderlac starts glowing much more brightly. Only wrapping it up completely conceals the light.

Soon the characters see the Tower of Skulls—an enormous structure of classic fantasy architecture, with a gigantic skull as an entranceway, several large skulls carved into the battlements and gargoyles everywhere. As they survey the area, the characters realize the troll guards have left! The tower looks almost abandoned, its gate standing open. But Prince Eldred senses the Skull King awaits him—and only one of them will survive the coming confrontation.

When the characters enter the fortress, the Sword of Vanderlac begins subtly drawing Prince Eldred toward the Skull King's throne room. If unaccompanied, the Prince simply walks through the dim and oppressive halls, encountering no one else. If other characters join him, the Skull King springs a trap—several trolls attack. The other characters must hold them off long enough for Prince Eldred to reach the Skull King.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE FINAL BATTLE

Prince Eldred finds the Skull King in his terrible Throne Hall. This enormous chamber must be at least half a kilometer long, and just as tall. Enormous, torch-like columns line the hall; huge goutts of flame flickering from their tops provide a fitful light. Vast arches support the ceiling; walking beneath them feels like walking under a gigantic guillotine.

At the far end of the hall stands the Gargoyle Throne, a gigantic seat made of iron carved in the shape of hideous gargoyles. It dwarfs even the tallest troll, yet somehow the skeletal figure seated upon it suffers no diminishment. The Skull King wears robes of a foul greenish color and a bejeweled, verdigrised crown. The characters can feel his evil; approaching him would be impossible without the Sword of Vanderlac's light to cut through the gloom. The atmosphere inside the castle is oppressive. The holodeck achieves this by using tractor beams to weigh the characters down.

When the Prince comes within hearing range, the Skull King speaks: "Thrice-damned fool! You should never have come here with the sword. Had you but sworn allegiance to me, forsaking your paltry birthright, I would have given you a kingdom more vast than any in Boralia. Now I shall give you only death!" He stands up, clearly showing the Prince the large, evilly-glowing **Stone of Corruption** (Accuracy 8, Block +0, Damage 2+2d6) grasped in his right hand.

Because the Sword of Vanderlac protects Prince Eldred from the Skull King's magic, the fiend must battle him for mastery of Boralia. If the Prince cannot defeat him in combat, the King shall conquer Boralia and enslave all its inhabitants.

Remember, the Skull King is *evil*, but in a melodramatic fantasy way. He won't kill Prince Eldred out of hand; he's too overconfident for that. Instead, he taunts and goads him, hoping to enrage him and lose control of himself. If he manages to stun the Prince, he's likely to let him recover (at least once or twice) so he can continue to "play" with him in a cat-and-mouse fashion before slaying him for good.

THE SKULL KING

Role: Antagonist

Type: Evil Lord

Backstory: Many think the Skull King a fallen god—his powers certainly seem godly. He tried enslaving Boralia once before, more than a thousand years ago. Although believed dead, he has risen again to threaten the world. This time he will not allow some unknown hero like Vanderlac to dispatch him.

Demeanor: Utterly evil.

Goals: Conquer the world; kill everyone who opposes him

Costume: The Skull King is a skeletal being wearing black robes. His eye sockets are filled with eerie, red-gold flames. He carries the Stone of Corruption, a fist-sized, red-glowing rock which exudes evil like a middenheap exudes stench.

Fitness: 6

Strength +1

Vitality +2

Coordination: 4

Intellect: 5

Perception +1

Presence: 6

Willpower +2

Psi: 0

Standard Skills: Command (Trolls) 3 (4), Dodge 4, History (Boralian) 4 (5), Primitive Weaponry (Stone Of Corruption) 3 (4), Stealth (Stealthy Movement) 3 (4)

Special Skills: Magic 8 (+2 of this is from the Stone of Corruption)

Traits: Invulnerability (can only be harmed by the Sword of Vanderlac) +6

Resistance: 8

Wound Levels: 8/8/8/8/8/0

VICTORY!

If the Prince prevails, the Stone of Corruption shatters and the Tower of Skulls immediately begins to rumble, shake and collapse. Eldred and his companions must escape quickly or become trapped and killed as it crumbles to ruin.

In the south the Skull King's troll armies find themselves leaderless. Without his driving force they are no match for the determined armies of Boralia. Most of the trolls flee back into the mountains.

DEFEAT

If the Skull King wins the battle, the Prince dies, the Sword of Vanderlac shatters, and the players lose the holonovel. Better luck next time.

END PROGRAM.

SEQUELS

The Skull and the Sword is one of many holonovels set in Boralia; new ones are programmed every year. Some possible sequels to this one include:

The Troll War: Instead of breaking and fleeing when the Skull King dies, the troll army rallies under the leadership of General Vorak, an enormously strong, extremely intelligent and devilishly clever troll warrior. He leads his people on a war of conquest and slaughter. Prince Eldred and his companions must lead the human army opposing him.

Ships of the Vulkrings: For those who prefer more mundane fantasies, this holonovel pits Prince Eldred and his companions against a force of Vulkring raiders pillaging the northern coastal towns. They must track the raiders down, stop them, and open a door for cordial relations with the more peaceful Vulkring kingdoms.